

1530.0 - ABS Forms Design Standards Manual, 2010

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About this Release

These standards are to be used in the design and preparation of self-administered collection forms (paper and electronic) and Computer Assisted Interviewing (CAI) interfaces. A good working knowledge of these standards should aid the development of forms that collect accurate data, ease the burden of respondents and ensure efficient processing.

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INTRODUCTION

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Aim of these standards

These standards are to be used in the design and preparation of self-administered collection forms (paper and electronic) and Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) interfaces. A good working knowledge of these standards should aid the development of forms that collect accurate data, ease the burden of respondents and ensure efficient processing.

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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Assistant Statisticians and Regional Directors

The relevant Assistant Statisticians and Regional Directors are ultimately responsible for approving forms before they are printed. They should ensure that the forms they approve conform to the standards.

They are also responsible for certifying ABS collection forms 'pursuant to Section 10 (1) of the Census and Statistics Act 1905'.

Refer to Chapter 3 (Data Collection) and Chapter 4 (Certification of Forms) of the ABS Policy and Legislation Manual "Developing and Conducting Statistical Collections" for more details on approval and certification of forms.

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Data Collection Methodology Section

Data Collection Methodology (DCM) Section is part of Statistical Support Branch, and their mission is:
To enable the collection of good quality data by providing expert advice and assistance on questionnaire design, methods of evaluation and respondent engagement. DCM assist in the development of their client's skills, undertake research and lead innovation in data collection methods.

Staff constructing forms can consult DCM on structure, wording or layout and design problems, and should consult DCM about the application and interpretation of the forms design standards or departures from them. For those external to the ABS this consultancy may attract a fee.

How to use these Standards

These standards are intended for use in the development of forms for ABS business surveys. However, many of the design principles included can be applied in the development of other kinds of forms. These standards are not intended to cover the entire range of questionnaire design theory but some references have been included as background.

Note that the term "respondent" has been used throughout this manual rather than the term "provider", which is more common in some areas of the ABS. In this context the provider is considered to be the selected unit, whether that is a business, a household, a building project or whatever. The respondent is the person who actually fills out the form or speaks to the interviewer.

Note also that the graphics of example questions used in this manual are illustrative only and don't necessarily reflect the ABS standard question wording. For example, in some cases the required notes have been removed.

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Mode Suitability Framework

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MODE SUITABILITY FRAMEWORK

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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Part A: Introduction

There are numerous data collection modes that can be used when conducting a survey. The success of the survey will depend to a large extent on the suitability of the data collection mode/s chosen. "No one data collection method is best for all circumstances. The choice of a particular approach must be made within the context of the particular objectives of the survey and the resources available" (Groves et al., 2004, p. 146).

This document begins by outlining general issues to consider when determining appropriate modes of data collection for ABS surveys. It then discusses combining multiple modes and the issues that can arise from this. An overview of the advantages and disadvantages of the main modes of data collection used in survey organisations is then given, along with issues to consider when assessing the suitability of the modes for particular types of surveys.

The separate Mode Suitability Model can be used in conjunction with this Framework document, to assist in determining a survey's overall suitability for a particular mode, and to easily compare the suitability of different modes for a survey. As at June 2008, the modes included in the model are CATI, mail surveys, fax surveys, and offline electronic forms. The document will be developed and expanded to include other modes over time.

It is intended that both the Mode Suitability Framework and the Mode Suitability Model will be updated over time as ABS policies and procedures with regards to data collection modes change.

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Part B: Factors influencing choice of mode

This part outlines in general terms some key issues that are important to consider when determining an appropriate data collection mode.

1. Complexity of topic

The depth and complexity of the topic to be covered in the survey, and the nature and form of the questions, will often dictate the collection mode to be employed. The likely quality or length of the response sought may also influence the choice of mode. For instance, it is often difficult to obtain answers to complex questions using telephone surveys, whereas self-administered surveys can include detailed explanatory notes, and face-to-face interviews, with the aid of features such as show-cards, can often yield a more detailed response. For surveys with complicated sequencing, an electronic version that performs this sequencing automatically is preferable to a paper version.

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2. Types of topics/data

The types of topics that can be properly covered in a survey vary across modes. For sensitive topics (e.g. income, drug use for household surveys; business practices, competitors etc. for business surveys), self-administered modes are generally preferred to interviews as they are seen as more private, allowing the respondent to feel more comfortable providing honest answers. Sometimes a face-to-face interview will include a self-administered module for this reason. Surveys which require respondents to check records before they can answer, or check with other people who may not be immediately available, should also use self-administered modes. For this reason a telephone survey might involve mailing a form out for respondents to complete, and then asking them to read out their answers over the phone.

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3. Non-response

The quality and reliability of survey data can be significantly affected by the degree of response to a survey. Although it is very rare to achieve a survey response rate of 100%, the choice of collection mode can significantly influence the response rate obtained. Face-to-face interviews can achieve a better response rate than surveys administered by mail or telephone because it is more difficult to refuse survey participation to a person's face. However other factors such as whether or not the survey is compulsory, whether or not it is repeated and how the follow-up is conducted can mediate the effect of mode on response.

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4. Respondent preference and burden

How the collection mode fits in with the lifestyle or working style of the respondent should influence what collection method will be used, as this will increase respondent motivation. Some respondents have a strong preference for completing their forms electronically, and under the *Electronic Transaction Act* (July 2001), respondents can insist on their right to do this for ABS surveys (within certain guidelines; see section 7 - "Legislative and Strategic Drivers").

The issue of respondent burden is also linked to their preference for particular modes. Some modes reduce reporting time for the respondent - for example, offering spreadsheets for a regular survey allows some respondents to program auto-completion of the form from their systems. However, this is dependent on the respondent - a mode that reduces reporting time for some respondents can increase it for others. Providing choice of mode (see Part C) is a useful method of giving respondents the choice to select the reporting method that is most suitable for them.

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5. Resources available

When human resources, money or time are limited, a less appropriate collection mode may be chosen in order to boost the number of responses or to get the responses more quickly. Such an option is often in conflict with the quality requirements of the survey. To compromise, a planned reduction in data quality, or a reduction in coverage might be alternatives considered. The likely fitness for purpose of the data collected should be kept in mind. It may not be possible to achieve the required outcomes with the resources available - in which case it may be more appropriate to make no attempt.

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6. Sampling frame and population

The type and quality of the sampling frame may influence the choice of mode. For example, if the target population includes the homeless, a mail survey is not suitable for that part of the population. The characteristics of the population may also influence the mode chosen. If we are interested in running a survey that includes, for example, shift workers or farmers who are unlikely to be available during the times an interviewer could reach them, then a mail survey would be more appropriate than an interview.

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7. Legislative and strategic drivers

Legislative and strategic drivers, particularly with regards to electronic data reporting, will also affect the mode/s offered. It is ABS policy that the electronic submission of data by respondents is not to be encouraged, due to security and cost issues. However, under the *Electronic Transactions Act*, ABS survey respondents can insist on electronic data submission. If the respondent can comply with ABS specified IT requirements, this request is generally accepted. The option to submit data via an Excel form is provided for a range of business surveys

(see section 3.8 for information on Excel forms). Standards for the design of ABS web forms are currently being drafted. Web forms are also becoming of interest to household survey areas.

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Part C - Mixed-mode design

Multiple modes of data collection can be used in the same survey - this is known as a "mixed-mode" design. Mixed-mode designs attempt to "...exploit the advantages of one mode... while neutralizing the disadvantages... through a combination of methods. Mixed-mode design thus involves explicit trade-offs of one source of error for another" (Groves et al., 2004, p. 164).

Allowing the respondent to choose the mode that suits them best can help maximise the response rate to the survey. Mixed-mode designs can also reduce costs - e.g. you might initially attempt to collect data via a mail survey (which is generally less expensive than interviewer-administered methods). You might then attempt to collect data from those who do not respond to the initial request for data, via interviewer-administered methods. Similarly, in longitudinal surveys, face-to-face interviewing might be used to collect data in the first wave of collection, to maximise response rates, establish rapport etc. Data in subsequent waves might then be collected by less expensive modes (Groves et al., 2004).

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1. Mode effects

"Mode effects" refer to the effects that characteristics of different data collection modes have on the way respondents answer the survey questions. Mode effects can be an issue in surveys where respondents provide their data via different methods, leading to differences in the data collected based on the mode used. For example, a web form that contains numerous edit checks may yield higher quality data than a paper form, where respondents are not made aware of illogical or inconsistent data they provide. Alternatively, the use of edits may lead to higher non-response and drop-off rates due to respondent frustration. Furthermore, when choice of mode is offered, there might be certain types of respondents who are more likely to choose a particular mode, which can influence the results obtained. It is therefore "... critical to ensure that any effects of the mode can be disentangled from other characteristics of the sample" (Groves et al., 2004, p. 164).

As another example, in "select all that apply" question formats, primacy and recency effects have been found to be influenced by mode, with primacy effects (the tendency for respondents to select more options from the start of a list) being more prevalent in self-administered forms, and recency effects (the tendency to select more options from the end of the list) being more prevalent in interviewer-administered forms. "Select all that apply" lists are often converted into separate questions with "yes" or "no" answers for interviewer-administered surveys ("forced choice" questions); however, in an investigation of self-administered forms, Smyth et al. (2006) found that these formats "... are not functional equivalents" (p. 76) - respondents spent more time responding to the forced choice questions, and were more likely to endorse more options in this format compared with the "select all that apply" format.

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Steps can be taken to attempt to minimise differences between modes. Groves et al. (2004) state that it is more important to ensure that instruments and procedures are similar across modes, rather than "... optimizing the design features for one particular mode" (p. 164). For example, they recommend that electronic surveys resemble the paper form equivalent as closely as possible, and functions such as edit checks, complex skips etc. should be avoided. To minimise mode effects due to design, layout etc., ABS best practice is to develop electronic forms that (within the constraints of the software) are as visually similar to their paper equivalents as possible. Electronic forms should also offer at least the same level of help, information and instructions as their paper equivalent.

One exception to a consistent look and feel between paper and electronic forms is where the respondent would have an expectation of certain functionality in an electronic form, which, if missing would have a negative impact on their experience, potentially compromising data quality. For example, some minimal edit checking (e.g. alpha responses not being permitted in numeric fields), and the presence of certain levels of functionality (e.g. automatic totalling of numeric data) would be expected by many respondents, and are permitted in ABS electronic forms where appropriate.

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2. Combining modes

Some modes of data collection should always be offered to respondents in conjunction with other modes, rather than being the only mode offered. This is particularly relevant for self-administered business forms, where the respondent is required to complete the form without the assistance of an interviewer. Fax forms (section 3.3), electronic forms (sections 3.7 & 3.8) and Interactive Voice Response (IVR) (section 4.4) should not be offered as the only method of providing data. This is because not all respondents will have access to the technology required (e.g. telephones, computers, internet, fax machines), and those who do have access may not feel comfortable providing data this way. Another method of providing data (generally a self-administered mail-out paper form for business surveys [section 3.2]) should generally always be offered in conjunction with these modes. However, there may be some instances where a single mode may be supported.

Modes that are commonly used together in the ABS include:

- Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI - section 2.3) and Computer Assisted Self Interviewing (CASI - section 3.6) in ABS household surveys. The CASI component of the interview is generally used to allow respondents to provide sensitive information privately.
- Paper mail-out forms - section 3.2 and Excel forms - section 3.8 for business surveys.
- Paper mail-out forms - section 3.2 and telephone interviews (section 4) for business surveys.

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Part D: Modes of data collection

1. Overview

In this part, data collection modes are described in terms of their main advantages and disadvantages, and the types of surveys they may be suitable for. For some modes, links to detailed suitability models are provided. The suitability models describe a range of measures or factors, which particular surveys can be assessed against to determine their relative suitability for conversion to the mode. A score is given for each factor, and scores are summed to yield a total "mode suitability" score. Further explanation on using the models is provided in each separate suitability model document.

This Part is divided into three broad categories:

- face-to-face (personal) interviews;
- self-administered forms; and
- telephone interviews.

The advantages, disadvantages, and suitability discussed at the start of each section apply to all of the modes within the section. In the discussion of each mode, additional advantages, disadvantages, and suitability considerations specific to the mode are discussed.

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2. Face-to-face (personal) interviews

In a face-to-face interview, an interviewer generally travels to the respondent's home or business, and asks the respondent the interview questions in person. In the ABS, face-to-face interviews are used more commonly for household surveys than business surveys, although there are some business surveys that also make use of this mode of collection.

The two types of face-to-face interviews described in this section are:

- Paper and Pencil Interviews (PAPIs)
- Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPIs)

2.1 Overview of advantages, disadvantages and suitability of face-to-face interviews

2.1.1 Advantages

- Face-to-face interviews generally yield the highest response rate, compared with the other modes described in this document. Respondents are less likely to refuse to complete the survey when they must refuse face-to-face to an interviewer.
- The interviewer is able to clarify the meaning of questions during the interview if the respondent is unsure of a question, and can probe them for more detail in their answers. This can lead to more complete and accurate data, and lower item non-response.
- Face-to-face interviews are an opportunity to facilitate good provider relations, presenting the ABS as professional and responsive.

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2.1.2 Disadvantages

- Face-to-face interviews are very expensive to conduct. There are costs involved in personnel, time, and other resources required to obtain, train, and manage an interviewer workforce. Field interviewers may need to be more highly trained compared to telephone interviewers in a centralised location, where "the task is less complex and centralized supervision is possible" (Groves et al., 2004, p. 161). Travelling from one respondent to another is another cost component in face-to-face interviews and is especially problematic when repeat visits are necessary to catch the respondent while they are available.
- Data can be subject to bias caused by the interviewer's appearance and attitude, as well as the way they phrase and rephrase questions and explanations (these are known as "interviewer effects").
- Social desirability bias, "the tendency to present oneself in a favorable light" (Groves et al., 2004, p. 155) can be a particular problem in face-to-face interviews. Respondents may overreport socially desirable behaviours and underreport socially undesirable behaviours, reducing the accuracy of their responses.
- Recency effects (the tendency to select more options from the end of a list of options) may be an issue, and affect the answers respondents provide.

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2.1.3 Suitability

- Face-to-face interviews can be suitable for surveys containing complex questions and concepts, which would be difficult for the respondent to complete unaided.
- Compared with self-administered forms, face-to-face interviews can be suitable for forms with many open-ended questions requiring detailed information (Rosenfeld et al., 1993). However, recording these types of responses adds to the burden on interviewers, and may frustrate respondents while they wait for the interviewer to finish recording their response, so they should not be used excessively.
- Face-to-face interviews are suitable for populations who have poor reading abilities.
- Face-to-face interviewing is unsuitable for obtaining sensitive or private information, as respondents may be uncomfortable disclosing this type of information to a stranger. However, for business surveys, commercially sensitive information (e.g. regarding market share, competitors, prices etc.) may be more likely to be disclosed in a personal interview situation rather than via other modes, because of the confidentiality assurance that an ABS Officer can give in person.

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2.2 Paper and Pencil Interview (PAPI)

In a "Paper and Pencil Interview" (PAPI), the interviewer asks the respondent the survey questions and records the responses on a paper form. PAPIs are used rarely for primary data capture in the ABS, with most face-to-face interviews conducted using CAPI (see section 2.3). Some post enumeration studies for business surveys are conducted using PAPIs.

2.2.1 Advantages

- See section 2.1.1.

2.2.2 Disadvantages

- See section 2.1.2.
- Compared with Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPIs, see section 2.3), a disadvantage of PAPIs is that there must be a separate data entry phase after the collection of the data, increasing processing time and cost.
- Interviewers must follow sequencing instructions manually, which can increase the length of the interview.

2.2.3 Suitability

- See section 2.1.3.
- Forms that require the interviewer to follow complex sequencing would be better converted to a CAPI (described in section 2.3), which automates this process.
- PAPIs may be more suitable for one-off surveys than ongoing surveys, as the costs associated with setting up and maintaining

software for electronic data collection may not be warranted.

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2.3 Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI)

When performing a "Computer Assisted Personal Interview" (CAPI), the interviewer takes a notebook computer to the interview and enters the data into the computer as the respondent provides it.

2.3.1 Advantages

- See section 2.1.1.
- Administering the survey via a computer is useful as it generally allows more flexibility to move around the form and automatically skip questions that don't apply to the respondent. It can make conducting surveys which require complex sequencing easier and quicker, as sequencing can be built into the instrument, reducing the likelihood of interview error in following sequencing instructions.
- The order of response categories can be randomised to minimise effects due to the order of items.
- Data is entered during the interview, meaning that there is no separate data entry stage, saving time and processing costs.
- Compared with a PAPI, edit checks can be carried out much more easily at the time of the interview, as the interviewer is automatically alerted to errors and inconsistencies in the data. This can improve data quality, as well as improve the overall timeliness of the survey, as the need to follow-up respondents to resolve anomalies in the data is reduced.
- Interviewers sometimes show a preference for CAPI compared with PAPI (Martin & Manners, 1995), and respondents may take the survey more seriously because a computer is involved.

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2.3.2 Disadvantages

- See section 2.1.2.
- There are increased costs involved in the set-up, maintenance and technical support for the computer equipment/software, and in training the interviewers to use the CAPI system.
- The actual interview time may increase as responses are coded and edited at the time of the interview, which can increase the burden on respondents.

2.3.3 Suitability

- See section 2.1.3.
- CAPIs can be suitable for surveys that contain complex sequencing, as this can be automatically built into the system. It is important that the sequences are thoroughly tested prior to the CAPI being used in the field, as any programming errors or bugs in the sequencing may mean that respondents are not asked questions they should be asked.
- Ongoing surveys may be suitable for CAPI, where the costs of implementing and maintaining the computer equipment and software are more justified compared to a one-off survey.

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3. Self-administered forms

Self-administered forms are those in which respondents complete the survey questionnaires themselves, without the involvement of an interviewer. In the ABS, self-administered forms are mostly used in surveys of businesses. Self-administered forms may be either paper forms or electronic forms. The types of forms discussed in this section are:

- Paper forms
 - Mail-out
 - Fax-out
 - Drop-off
- Computerised Self-Administered Questionnaires (CSAQs)
 - Computer Assisted Self-Administered Questionnaire (CASI)
 - Web forms
 - Offline electronic forms

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3.1 Overview of advantages, disadvantages and suitability of self-administered forms

3.1.1 Advantages

- The social desirability effects that can be a problem in interviewer-administered surveys are reduced in self-administered surveys, meaning that more honest answers may be provided in responses to sensitive questions.
- Detailed instructions, explanations, and examples can be included on the form, which can help respondents understand the questions, and lead to better quality data.
- The respondent can complete the form in their own time, rather than having to do it in a structured session with an interviewer.
- The costs associated with employing interviewers for the survey (recruitment, training, travel etc.) are removed.
- The interviewer effects described in section 2.1.2 are eliminated.

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3.1.2 Disadvantages

- Self-administered surveys generally have lower response rates (unit and item) compared with interviewer-administered surveys.
- With the exception of CASIs (see section 3.6), an interviewer is not present while the respondent completes the form. This means they cannot encourage the respondent to complete the survey (or particular questions within the survey), and if the respondent encounters difficulties with the questions or other aspects of the form, they cannot ask for clarification or additional information. This may lead to confusion, errors and non-response (Groves et al., 2004). For this reason, it is important that respondents are provided with instructions on who to contact to obtain additional assistance if they require it.
- Some of the costs associated with administration of the survey are passed from the ABS, to the respondent. For example, there are costs incurred by the respondent in faxing back forms (see Fax-out forms - section 3.3) and downloading web forms (see Web forms - section 3.7).

- Primacy effects (the tendency to select more options from the start of a list of options) may be an issue in self-administered forms.

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3.1.3 Suitability

- Self-administered forms are suitable for surveys that contain questions requiring respondents to consult records or other people in order to obtain the relevant information, as the respondent can do this in their own time.
- Self-administered forms are more appropriate for asking questions about sensitive topics compared with interviewer-administered surveys.
- Self-administered forms are not appropriate for potential respondents with limited ability to read or write English (unless questionnaires are provided in the appropriate language).

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Paper forms

3.2 Mail-out forms

Mail-out forms are sent via the post to respondents with a return-paid envelope so that the respondent can mail back the completed form.

3.2.1 Advantages

- See section 3.1.1.
- It is less expensive than face-to-face and telephone interviewing.
- A wider range of geographic areas can be covered for far lower cost than face-to-face interviews.
- It allows access to "difficult to contact" respondents; for example, those people who only provide post office boxes as addresses, residents of apartment buildings, and respondents who are away from home or the workplace a great deal.

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3.2.2 Disadvantages

- See section 3.1.2.
- The major disadvantage with mail surveys is that they can have relatively low response rates, due in part to the difficulty in maintaining accurate address and contact details. Note that some survey support areas call respondents prior to dispatch to confirm all contact details, including mailing addresses. This helps reduce the number of Return to Sender forms and may help increase timeliness and response rates.
- The reliance on postal services and on respondents to find the time to complete the form, can cause data to be slow to become available due to the lag in time between when the questionnaire is mailed out and the time it is returned (although this effect is reduced when surveys are repeated regularly). [Back to top](#)

3.2.3 Suitability

- See section 3.1.3.
- Mail-out forms are not suitable for forms with complex sequencing instructions, as this can lead to errors (e.g. respondents skipping questions they are supposed to answer, or answering questions that do not apply to them).

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3.3 Fax-out forms

During the process of following up non-response of business surveys (Intensive Follow-Up - IFU), the ABS regularly redispaches survey forms via fax to business survey respondents, when the respondent requests this method of dispatch, or when the survey due date is near and timeliness is an issue. Black and white versions of the standard paper form are used, to increase the readability of the questions. Modern fax technology provides the ability to send bulk faxes electronically, rather than one by one manually.

Note that this section covers the use of fax forms in the ABS as at June 2008. Changes will soon be made to the way fax forms are produced, and this will affect the information in this section (particularly some of the current disadvantages, which will no longer apply due to improved procedures).

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3.3.1 Advantages

- See section 3.1.1.
- Unlike mail-out forms, the speed of delivery and return of fax forms is a matter of minutes rather than days. For this reason form due dates can be up to a week longer, as there is no need to account for possible mail delays (this is particularly relevant for remote respondents).
- The sender is notified immediately if sending fails. Where there is a significant time lapse between a mail form being posted and it being returned to the sender if the address is incorrect, the sender is notified right away. This allows a greater period of time to find an alternate fax number.
- Timing of delivery can be programmed so that the form arrives at a predetermined time. For example, business surveys can be programmed to be faxed on a Sunday afternoon so that they are more likely to be on the top of the pile on Monday morning.

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3.3.2 Disadvantages

- See section 3.1.2.
- The quality of the form image is dependent on the receiving machine, and fax transmissions are limited to black and white. For these reasons, fax forms must be simplified and contain minimal shading and bold text. These modifications may result in a poorer quality form compared with a mail-out form.
- Transmission speed is dependent on the amount of ink on the original document, and the length of the form. Long forms may fail to send, particularly if the receiving machine is an older model.
- The receiving machine must be turned on and have paper and ink or delivery will fail.
- Many survey respondents prefer email to fax. While many businesses have a fax machine, they are very rare in households. For this reason email is more widely accessible than fax.
- While a business has a registered address, in order to get a valid fax number the business may need to be contacted by phone or

mail, increasing costs and processing time.

- ABS fax numbers are not free-call numbers, meaning that the cost of submitting the data is passed on to the respondent.
- Current ABS practice means that unit IDs are not included on every page of the form. This can lead to problems when the form is faxed back, for example, pages of a faxed-back form may be interspersed with other fax forms, making identification of the relevant unit difficult.

3.3.3 Suitability

- See section 3.1.3.
- Fax forms are best suited to business survey respondents.
- They are only suitable for black and white forms with minimal bold and shading ("fax friendly forms"), and should be limited to short forms (under 20 pages).
- Fax forms are most appropriate as an alternate redispach or return method for mail-out forms near the end of the survey cycle, when timeliness is an issue.

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3.4 Drop-off forms

In a drop-off survey, the form is delivered to respondents by an interviewer who explains the aims of the survey and how to complete the form. The form is left with the respondent to be completed, and is either mailed back by the respondent ("drop-off/mail-back" method) or collected by the interviewer at a later date ("drop-off/pick-up" method).

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3.4.1 Advantages

- See section 3.1.1.
- Response rates to drop-off surveys are usually higher than for mail surveys. This is because respondents tend to feel a higher level of accountability to return the form, as they have had personal interaction with an interviewer, and may have agreed to return the form. The respondent may also feel obligated to make the effort to respond to reciprocate the effort made by the interviewer to drop the form off.
- Respondents can complete the form at a time that suits them.

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3.4.2 Disadvantages

- See section 3.1.2.
- The costs involved in using interviewers makes this technique more expensive than mail surveys (although they are less expensive than face-to-face interviews).
- As with a face-to-face interview, the respondent must be available when the interviewer visits; if they are not, this adds to the cost and time involved in collecting their data at another time.

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3.4.3 Suitability

- See section 3.1.3.
- The drop-off method is appropriate for surveys in which the interviewer needs to screen the household as to whether or not they are in scope of the survey, and/or for surveys in which the interviewer needs to select the correct person in the household to complete the survey.
- Drop-off surveys are suitable when some information best collected using self-administered methods need to be collected along with other types of information which may be too complex or sensitive for the respondent to provide in a self-administered form - this information can be collected by the interviewer instead.
- Drop-off surveys can be used to ensure that basic information (e.g. about the dwelling) is collected initially by the interviewer, in case the respondent does not return the form.

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Computerised self-administered questionnaires (CSAQs)

"Computerised self-administered questionnaires" (CSAQs - Groves et al., 2004) are self-administered forms that respondents complete themselves electronically, using a computer.

3.5 Overview of advantages, disadvantages and suitability of CSAQs

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3.5.1 Advantages

- Allowing forms to be completed and submitted electronically produces a faster response than other self-administered methods.
- Automatic sequencing can be built into the form so that only the questions relevant to the respondent are visible, reducing the burden on respondents in following sequencing instructions.
- Edit checks can be incorporated into the form, helping to reduce respondent errors, and increase data quality.
- The order of the questions and response options can be randomised across respondents to reduce effects caused by the order that the questions and responses appear in (Groves et al. 2004).
- Respondents enter their own information into the system, reducing data entry and processing costs. Costs associated with printing and mailing paper forms are also eliminated.
- Compared with interviewer-administered surveys, social desirability effects can be reduced, because respondents are likely to be more comfortable providing honest answers to a computer than a person.
- Once created, the form can generally be modified for future use with relatively little effort or expense.
- Compared with mail forms, web forms or offline electronic forms can be useful for surveying large businesses, where the form must be completed by different people within the organisation (e.g. Payroll, R&D, etc., areas which may be located in different States). Web or offline forms allow the relevant parts of a form to be easily accessed and completed by the appropriate person in the organisation. The final data can then be lodged by the primary ABS respondent.

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3.5.2 Disadvantages

- The costs involved in developing the forms, maintaining the systems, and ensuring the security of data can be high. However, while the set-up costs are higher than for mail surveys, the "per case" costs of electronic forms are very low (Groves et al., 2004).
- If the form is to be completed on the respondent's own computer, this method requires respondents to have compatible computer software, and help-desk type staff may be necessary to support the use of the form.
- Electronic forms with a large number of edits can be frustrating for respondents (potentially affecting response rates). This is where good form design, minimising the number of mandatory questions, and targeting edits to where they add the most value to the data quality, become important.
- Technical problems may occur with the system, leading to loss of data and respondent frustration.
- There can be increased burden/cost faced by the respondent, e.g. download costs.

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3.5.3 Suitability

- Respondents must be computer literate.
- For web forms and offline forms, respondents must have access to a computer and the Internet, and/or be prepared to use an ABS storage device. They may also be required to have specific software.
- The costs associated with setting up the computer software etc. mean that CSAQs are more suitable for ongoing, rather than one-off surveys.
- CSAQs are not suitable for questions requiring respondents to provide detailed open-ended responses, as typing in this information can become too burdensome.

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3.6 Computer Assisted Self Administered Interview (CASI)

In a "Computer Assisted Self Administered Interview" (CASI) an interviewer visits the respondent with a notebook computer containing an electronic version of the questionnaire. The respondent uses the computer to complete the form themselves, rather than being asked the questions by the interviewer. CASIs are often used as part of a CAPI (see section 2.3), with the interviewer handing over the computer for part of the interview, e.g. so that particularly sensitive sections of the questionnaire can be completed by the respondent privately. In this type of interview, the interviewer remains present to provide assistance to the respondent when required.

3.6.1 Advantages

- See section 3.5.1.
- Compared with a CSAQ in which an interviewer is not present, CASIs allow the respondent to ask the interviewer for further information/clarification when required, which may lead to better quality data.
- Compared with a paper self-administered form, CASIs allow the use of edits and automatic sequencing, which can help reduce errors.

3.6.2 Disadvantages

- See section 3.5.2.
- If the respondent's computer literacy is low, they are likely to find it difficult to use the CASI system.

3.6.3 Suitability

- See section 3.5.3.

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3.7 Web forms

Web forms are forms that are completed by respondents online, over the Internet. Respondents are generally sent an email or letter containing information about the survey, and a link (or URL) to an online form. An authentication process is usually undertaken before the respondent can begin the survey, in which they must enter unique information provided by the survey organisation (e.g. a username and password). Web forms may be either resumable or non-resumable. Resumable forms can be saved and re-entered at a later time to complete, while non-resumable forms must be completed in one session for the information provided to be able to be submitted.

All Australian government departments and agencies should follow usability and accessibility guidelines when designing websites and web forms. The guidelines aim to ensure that web content is accessible and usable for all users, regardless of disabilities they may have, or the type of hardware/software they use to access the web.

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3.7.1 Advantages

- See section 3.5.1.
- The form can be sent to, and returned by, the respondent much more quickly than is the case for other self-administered surveys (e.g. mail forms), meaning that the data collection process is much quicker.
- The form can be sent to anyone with internet access, even in geographic locations where other methods (e.g. mail forms, face-to-face interviewing) would be difficult or impossible.

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3.7.2 Disadvantages

- See section 3.5.2.
- Not every person or business has access to the web. Respondents without internet access are automatically excluded from the sample if web forms are the only mode of collection being offered, which could lead to biased results.
- Even if completing the form online is optional (e.g. respondents can choose to complete a paper alternative), there are likely to be differences between respondents who choose to do the online form compared to those who opt to do the paper form. For example, younger respondents, and those who are more highly educated (Groves et al., 2004) may be more comfortable using the online option, which may affect results. Conversely, these respondents are becoming harder to engage through traditional collection methods, so some bias in data may be the trade-off for maintaining overall response rates and ensuring that certain demographic groups are represented in the results.
- Respondents may be reluctant to use web forms due to concerns about privacy or security issues, compromising response rates.
- For non-resumable forms, the form must be completed in one session. Data will be lost if the window is accidentally closed, or if a

technical problem occurs while the respondent is completing the form.

- It is easy for a frustrated respondent to terminate the session by simply closing the web browser.
- There may be variation in respondents' computer settings (e.g. browser specifications or operating systems), that make it difficult to standardise the appearance of the form. For example, if a high level of functionality, sophisticated graphics, etc. are used, then some users may not be able to use the form due to the limitations of their operating system. This risk can be mitigated through good design (e.g. caching static content, especially images) and having a "lowest common denominator" approach (e.g. a form that works reasonably well on a 56k dialup connection will work well for those with broadband).

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3.7.3 Suitability

- See section 3.5.3.
- If this is the only mode offered, the sample should be limited to respondents who are likely have internet access, to be computer literate, and comfortable using the internet to complete forms. It should be remembered that this will limit the extent to which the results can be generalised.
- Forms with complex sequencing can be suitable for conversion to web-administration, as automating the sequencing removes the burden of following sequencing instructions from the respondent or interviewer.

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3.8 Offline electronic forms

Offline electronic forms differ from web forms in that the file containing the form is saved by the respondent, and completed offline, before being submitted. The electronic form is usually sent to the respondent via email. In a "disk-by-mail" survey, however, the respondent is sent a disk through the mail, containing an electronic version of the form. The respondent answers the survey questions on their own computer, and the responses are recorded on the disk. The respondent then mails the disk back to the ABS. This mode has been used for ABS business surveys such as the Survey of International Investment.

Some business survey respondents submit their data using Microsoft Excel forms. The respondent is sent the form as an email attachment. They then save the form, complete it offline, and submit the completed form via the ABS "Secure Deposit Box", which allows secure, authenticated lodgement of files from respondents via the ABS Web site. ABS Excel forms currently contain basic functions such as formulae to automatically calculate totals, and macros that add additional rows if extra space is required. ABS Excel forms are generally designed to look quite similar to the paper equivalent.

Adobe LiveCycle can be used to create PDF forms that can be distributed to respondents via email, or published on a website. There are two types of PDF forms according to the Adobe website: "fill-and-print" forms, and "interactive" forms. Fill-and-print forms must be printed, filled out by hand, and returned via mail or fax. Interactive forms can be completed electronically, and can then be either printed and submitted by mail/fax, or submitted electronically by pressing a "Submit" button that appears on the form. Depending on the settings, submitting the form electronically either uploads the data entered on the form, or exports the data to a file that the respondent returns through email. Built-in security features safeguard the privacy of electronically submitted data. Respondents may be given the option to save a copy of the completed form, showing all the information they entered. At present the ABS does not send respondents PDF forms to complete.

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3.8.1 Advantages

- Offline forms share many of the same advantages as web forms (see Web-forms - section 3.7.1), as well as the general advantages of CSAQs (section 3.5.1).
- An advantage of forms created in spreadsheets such as Excel is that respondents can write programs for autocompletion of the form, which allows the relevant parts of the spreadsheet to be automatically populated with data from their electronic records.
- Respondents may feel more comfortable providing data in offline forms, compared with online web forms, due to greater concerns about security with web forms.
- Offline forms can usually be saved easily, meaning that data may be less likely to be lost compared with web forms.

3.8.2 Disadvantages

- See section 3.5.2.
- Compared with web forms, programs used to create offline forms may not have the same flexibility in terms of automatic sequencing etc.
- Writing programs for autocompletion is an additional burden for the respondent, particularly if the form questions change and they have to modify their program.

3.8.3 Suitability

- See section 3.5.3.
- Respondents must have access to a computer.

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4. Telephone interviews

In the ABS, telephone surveys are used for both household and business surveys, for data collection, intensive follow-up, and post enumeration studies. The modes of data collection described in this section are:

- Telephone PAPI
- Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI)
- Interactive Voice Response (IVR)

Most of the telephone interviewing methods involve potential respondents being telephoned and asked the survey questions over the phone by an interviewer. In an IVR survey, however, there may be no interviewer involvement at all (see Interactive Voice Response section 4.4).

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4.1 Overview of advantages, disadvantages and suitability of telephone interviews

4.1.1 Advantages

- Compared with face-to-face interviews, costs are reduced in telephone interviews, as fewer interviewers are required, and there are no travel costs involved.
- Telephone surveys produce more timely results compared with face-to-face interviews and mail surveys.
- Call-backs for people not answering, and follow-ups for additional information are relatively quick and inexpensive.
- Monitoring of interviewing staff is possible, so that consistency of performance can be higher.
- "Call scheduling" is possible, where respondents can be called at convenient times or when information is available. Also, if the phone is engaged, the system will reschedule the call, improving interviewer efficiency.

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4.1.2 Disadvantages

- Telephone interviews are very limited in the number and complexity of the questions that can be asked. The amount of information that respondents can retain when it is administered orally is limited, compared with when the survey questions are administered in written form.
- Non-response and partial non-response can be high compared with face-to-face interviews, due to the ease with which the respondent can terminate the interview.
- Particular types of participants can be difficult to reach via telephone, for example, farmers, and people who on the "Do not call" register.
- A bias is introduced because people with no phones or who are rarely available are excluded, and it is difficult to produce a reliable sampling frame because of unlisted numbers and changes in addresses (therefore changes in numbers).
- There can be problems with convincing respondents of the legitimacy of the survey (Tourangeau et al., 2000) and the confidentiality of results over the phone.
- Like any interviewer-administered questionnaire, answers to sensitive questions may be affected by social desirability effects, leading to under-reporting of socially undesirable behaviours.
- Recency effects (the tendency to select more options from the end of a list of options) may be an issue.

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4.1.3 Suitability

- Telephone surveys should be short - the longer the survey, the higher the burden on respondents, and the less likely they are to provide considered answers. Of all the data collection modes, telephone surveys are particularly prone to time pressure and respondent fatigue.
- Telephone surveys are unsuitable for forms with conceptually complex questions, questions with long lists of response options to be read out, and those that require a large amount of record checking.
- The target population should be able to be reached by telephone relatively easily.
- Like face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews are suitable for populations who have poor reading abilities. [Back to top](#)

4.2 Telephone PAPI

As the name suggests, a "Telephone PAPI" is similar to a face-to-face PAPI (see section 2.2) in that an interviewer reads and records the survey questions using a paper form; however, the interview is conducted via telephone rather than in person. The form should contain proper scripting, rather than being a duplicate of a self-administered form. This is to ensure that the way questions are asked is standardised across interviewers, and increases the likelihood of the interviewer conveying all relevant information.

4.2.1 Advantages

- See section 4.1.1

4.2.2 Disadvantages

- See section 4.1.2.
- Compared with telephone interviews in which a computer is used to collect the data (e.g. CATIs - section 4.3), in PAPIs, there must be a separate data entry phase after the collection of the data, increasing processing time and cost.

4.2.3 Suitability

- See section 4.1.3
- Forms that require the interviewer to follow complex sequencing would be better converted to a CATI (section 4.3), which automates this process.

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4.3 Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI)

In a "Computer Assisted Telephone Interview" (CATI), the interviewer reads the survey questions, and records the respondent's answers, using a computer interface (instead of a paper script/questionnaire). The computer interface contains scripted questions, and the same notes and definitions as the paper form, for the interviewer to refer to if necessary. At the ABS, CATI interfaces are generally built using Blaise.

CATI is used for both business and household surveys at the ABS. For business surveys, the use of CATIs is centralised. CATI is decentralised for household surveys, with interviewers conducting the interviews from their own homes. Centralisation is recommended, as it allows standardised interviewing procedures and better quality control, through making recruitment, training, supervision and monitoring of interviewers easier and more standardised. This can help avoid variation in response rates and estimates that are due to different procedures being used. It also allows for better access to technical support for the CATI systems.

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4.3.1 Advantages

- See section 4.1.1
- Data is entered during the interview itself, so there is no separate data entry phase (saving time and resources).
- Higher quality data may be collected compared to in a normal telephone interview. This is because:
 - a. interviewers are likely to adhere to the questionnaire more strictly. This can reduce interviewer bias, and lead to interviews that are likely to have less item non-response and missing data (Groves & Nicholls, 1986), and are more standardised across

- interviewers (Tourangeau et al. (2000)).
- b. automatic edits and checks help reduce data entry errors and alert the interviewer to inconsistent or unlikely answers, improving data quality and decreasing processing time.
- c. sequencing can be automatically built into the system, meaning that interviewers do not have to manually follow complex sequencing instructions, reducing errors.

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4.3.2 Disadvantages

- See section 4.1.2.
- The set-up costs of the interface can be high.
- Interviewers must have computing skills and be trained to properly use the computer system.
- Compared with other telephone interviews, interview time is increased because editing is done while the interview is being performed - this can increase non-response.

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4.3.3 Suitability

- See section 4.1.3
- Surveys that are run frequently, and that have large sample sizes are more suitable for conversion to CATI from a cost-benefit perspective.
- Also from a cost perspective, surveys that have many questions in common with other surveys (e.g. those based largely on Standard Question Wording) are more suitable for CATI, as the instrument will then be easier to adapt to other surveys in the future.

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4.4 Interactive Voice Response (IVR)

IVR is a computerised telephony system that has the ability to interact on a basic level with telephone users. A prerecorded voice lists a series of options, prompts and questions. The way in which the user provides their response depends on whether it is an Telephone Data Entry (TDE) or Automated Speech Recognition (ASR) system. In TDE, users enter their responses by pressing numbers on a telephone keypad; the corresponding tone then inputs the response to the system. In ASR, users enter their responses verbally, speaking a simple answer that the system is programmed to recognise. The system may repeat the user's responses so that the user can confirm or amend them. A single IVR system may allow both ASR and TDE input (e.g. users can either say "yes", or press 1, in response to a prompt).

See section 4.1 for general advantages, disadvantages and suitability considerations that apply to IVR along with other telephone survey modes. Below are some considerations that apply specifically to IVR.

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4.4.1 Advantages

4.4.1.1 TDE and ASR

- The interviewer is replaced by a computer, which is cost-effective in the long-term.
- Responses are coded and automatically entered immediately into the data collection system. This enables the removal of transcription errors.
- Questions are easily standardised, because there are no interviewer effects or errors that are not experienced by all respondents.
- The survey can be administered in the comfort of the respondent's home or business.
- Respondents with poor written communication skills can use this system.

4.4.1.2 TDE

- Respondents may feel more comfortable answering sensitive questions when they can submit their responses silently, and when they know that their responses are not being considered by a human interviewer.
- Respondents with poor oral communication skills can easily use the system.

4.4.1.3 ASR

- Respondents do not need a touchtone telephone to complete the interview.
- Response options are not as restricted compared with TDE, meaning that more detailed responses are allowed.

4.4.2 Disadvantages

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4.4.2.1 TDE and ASR

- IVR systems are expensive to set-up compared with traditional methods of data collection such as mail or telephone.
- Response rates may be compromised when the burden is on the respondent to initiate contact before submitting data (i.e. in inbound IVR).
- Respondents are more likely to hang-up on a machine than a human if they feel frustrated, which may compromise response rates.
- The computer may not be able to reiterate the questions, or provide more information to help the respondent understand the question.

4.4.2.2 TDE

- Providers without a touchtone pad on their phone are immediately excluded from the use of this data collection method. This may lead to exclusion of respondents with older models of telephones (e.g. older and poorer respondents).
- Respondents who report information via a mobile or cordless phone might have trouble keying in responses because they have to take the phone away from their head to do so.
- Respondents may have trouble navigating their way through the telephone survey, if there are lots of options to remember etc. Ensuring that the system follows sound design standards is crucial to minimise this problem.
- Typing errors are possible, and having the system repeat answers to ensure they are correct can become tedious and frustrating.

4.4.2.3 ASR

- There may be issues with language and accent variation. Respondents might use obscure language to answer a question or a term or phrase that the computer is not familiar with, and the response will be invalid. Background noise can also interfere with the system's ability to recognise respondents' input.
- Compared with TDE (where respondents can respond to the questions 'silently' using the keypad), sensitive topics are more likely to elicit non-response in ASR. The respondent is required to say their responses out loud, which may lead to them reporting socially desirable responses when answering sensitive questions in the company of family members, colleagues etc.

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4.4.3 Suitability

Surveys that may be suitable for administration via IVR are those in which:

- the target respondent population is likely to have touchtone telephones (for TDE) - however, note that IVR should never be the only method offered to respondents.
- the same respondents participate on a regular, ongoing basis (e.g. monthly). This increases the likelihood that respondents will be familiar with the system, questions, and expected responses. Respondents in less frequent or one-off surveys will be more likely to require assistance in using the system and answering the questions. The high costs involved in setting up an IVR system also make it inappropriate for one-off or infrequent surveys.
- the survey is short. ONS experience shows that TDE is only suitable for surveys that collect 9 or less data items (Lewis, 2006). As a general "rule of thumb", an IVR transaction should be able to be completed in ten minutes or less (Electronic Commerce Best Practices, 2000).
- the questions are simple, and do not require detailed responses. Questions with complex explanatory notes, definitions or long lists of items to select from are unsuitable for IVR. It is unrealistic to expect respondents to listen to a long list of instructions or explanations, and to remember all of this information when it comes time to give their response - this is likely to lead to frustration, errors, and the provision of poor quality data. Surveys in which respondents report a high number of nil values may be suitable for IVR, as entering this information is relatively simple.
- the sample size is large, and the survey has many questions in common with other surveys. These surveys are more suitable for conversion to IVR from a cost-benefit perspective.
- record checking is not required. The time a respondent would need to spend looking up information in their records in order to answer a question would increase the overall length of the call. Also, long periods of silence without respondent input may cause the system technical difficulties (as IVR systems generally interpret prolonged silence as the respondent requiring assistance).

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Part E: Conclusions

This document describes the advantages, disadvantages and suitability of a range of data collection modes. The Mode Suitability Model can be used in conjunction with this document to easily compare and contrast the suitability of different modes for a particular survey.

With the popularity of electronic data reporting increasing, more ABS self-administered paper surveys will need to have an electronic alternative. With the increase of electronic forms, the use of fax forms should decrease. In terms of interviewer-administered methods, computerised versions of the form are now used almost exclusively in face-to-face interviews. Telephone PAPIs are likely to become less common as more surveys are converted to CATI and IVR. Current CATI surveys may also be converted to IVR.

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Part F: References

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Mode Suitability Model

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MODE SUITABILITY MODEL

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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- Overview
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- Size of Survey
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Overview

This document provides a list of factors that should be considered when determining a suitable mode to use as the **primary mode** of data collection for a survey. Several modes of collection are assessed against each factor, in terms of the mode's suitability for surveys with certain characteristics.

The document will eventually contain the main modes of data collection used at the ABS. As of June 2008, the modes covered in the document are:

- Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI)
- Mail forms
- Fax forms
- Offline electronic forms (e.g. Excel and PDF forms)

It is strongly recommended that people involved in determining an appropriate data collection method for a survey read the Mode Suitability Framework document, for a more detailed discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of common modes, and the types of surveys they are suitable for. The present document is intended to be read in conjunction with the Mode Suitability Framework, providing a succinct summary of the factors to consider, and allowing the suitability of different modes for a survey to be easily compared.

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How to use this document

Thirteen factors that are relevant when determining a mode's suitability as the primary data collection method for a survey are listed in the table below. Each mode is assessed against the factors, and is given a suitability rating in terms of how suitable it is for surveys with that characteristic. The rating system uses a "traffic light" approach with each colour representing the following:

-  = Against the factor, the mode is suitable
-  = Against the factor, the mode may be suitable, but there are modes that are more suitable for surveys with that characteristic.
-  = Against the factor, the mode is unsuitable.
- NA = The factor is not relevant for the mode.

For each factor listed in the left hand column of the table, find the relevant characteristic that matches the survey that is being assessed against the particular mode/s listed at the top of the table. For example, if considering an offline electronic form (such as an Excel form) for a survey that is run quarterly, the survey would get a "green light" against factor 1 ("Survey frequency"), indicating that against this factor, an offline form is likely to be suitable. Each survey should obtain only one rating per factor.

To get an overall indication of a mode's suitability for a survey, assess the survey against each factor for the mode being investigated, and then add up the number of green, amber, and red lights obtained for that mode.

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Scoring

- The more green lights , the greater the suitability of the mode for the survey.
- If a mode has more than 4 amber lights , it is likely that another mode will be more suitable, and it is therefore recommended that a different mode is considered.
- As a general guideline, if a mode yields more than 2 red lights , it is highly likely to be unsuitable for the survey, and an alternative mode should be considered.

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Important notes on using this document

This document is intended to provide a range of issues to consider when determining an appropriate mode to use as the **main mode** of data collection for a survey. The ratings are not intended to apply when considering the mode as part of a mixed mode design. This is because mixing modes introduces greater complexity, and the suitability of each mode would depend on which other modes are being offered. This would make it difficult to provide general suitability guidelines for the mode using the simple rating scale that has been used below. For example, when assessing the suitability of fax forms below, it is assumed this is being considered as the main mode of data collection (e.g. not as an alternative method to a mail survey in a mixed mode design).

The suitability scores below also assume that (a) the target respondents have access to the technology/equipment required to be able to complete the forms (e.g. a fax machine if fax forms are being considered); and (b) the ABS has access to the required frame in order to make contact with respondents.

As surveys may have their own complex and unique issues, the model is not intended to provide an absolute measure of suitability, and is to be used as a guide only. The Mode Suitability Framework document contains further explanation about the rationale behind the ratings given in this document.

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Suitability ratings

Factor	Mode of <u>primary</u> data collection (See relevant sections in Mode Suitability Framework for more information on the advantages,
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disadvantages, and suitability of each mode)			
CATI (section 4.3)	Mail forms (section 3.2)	Fax forms (section 3.3)	Offline forms (section 3.8)

Size of the survey

1. Survey frequency

The frequency with which a survey is run is an important factor to consider when determining an appropriate mode. The higher the frequency, the less suitable a mail survey is, due to the delays between dispatch and receipt of the form. When converting to a mode where the initial set-up costs are high (e.g. CATI, IVR), surveys that are run more frequently may be more suitable from a cost-benefit perspective. Fax forms may be more suitable for higher-frequency surveys, because respondents are more likely to be anticipating the form's arrival, compared to a one-off or infrequent survey.

	CATI	Mail forms	Fax forms	Offline forms
Monthly				
Quarterly				
Half yearly				
Annual				
Less frequent				

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2. Sample size

When considering converting a survey to a mode with a high set-up cost (e.g. IVR, CATI), surveys with bigger sample sizes are generally more appropriate from a cost-benefit perspective. The suitability of other modes, such as mail surveys, is less affected by sample size differences.

	CATI	Mail forms	Fax forms	Offline forms
10 thousand or more				
Under 10 to 5 thousand				
Under 5 to 2 thousand				
Under 2 to 1 thousand				
Under 1 thousand				

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3. Survey generalisability

The amount of content that a survey has in common with other surveys should be considered. For example, if most of the questions in the survey are from Standard Question Wording (SQW), then CATIs, IVR surveys, web forms etc. will be more easily adapted to the other surveys which use SQW, therefore potentially saving development time. Note that this factor does not include coverage and reference period questions which are common to almost all surveys. Also note that the length of the survey should be considered when assessing the survey's generalisability - it may still be cost effective to develop CATI, electronic forms etc. for short forms that do not have much (or any) content common with other surveys.

	CATI	Mail forms	Fax forms	Offline forms
All questions common to many other surveys				
Most questions common to many other surveys				
Most questions common to some other surveys				
Some questions common to some other surveys				
No questions common to any other survey				

Provider load

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4. Time taken/interview length

This factor refers to the estimated time taken to complete the survey form, either for respondents (for self-administered forms) or for interviewers. Interview length is particularly important to consider for telephone surveys, as this method is unsuitable for long surveys due to provider load concerns. Fax is also unsuitable for long forms, due to the effort/cost required for the respondent to send the form back to the ABS, and possible problems with pages becoming separated during transmission.

	CATI	Mail forms	Fax forms	Offline forms
5 minutes or less				
6-10 minutes				
11-20 minutes				
21-30 minutes				
31 minutes or more				

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5. Total number of data items

This factor is included in addition to time taken as a measure of provider load, because self-reported time taken can be imprecise. A data item in this context is roughly interpreted as equalling the potential number of answers (including yes/no questions), or the number of

decisions the respondent may have to make. This includes counting every item in a "mark all that apply" question as one, because when conducted in a verbal interview, each item will need to be considered separately. As described in Factor 4, telephone surveys and fax surveys are less suitable for forms with a large number of data items due to the increased burden placed on respondents.

	CATI	Mail forms	Fax forms	Offline forms
5 or less				
6-10				
11-20				
21-40				
41 or more				

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6. Question complexity

The complexity of the survey questions is very important to consider, but is a difficult factor to measure. The intention of this factor is to capture the amount of explanatory notes required to understand the questions, as well as the space taken up by complex matrix structures etc. This factor uses the proportion of the form and other material (not including front page) taken up by instructions, which allows for a consideration of text regardless of how tightly cramped the spacing is. Note that forms with complexity at the higher end (above around 60%) may be problematic in terms of provider load, and consideration should be given to simplifying the form.

	CATI	Mail forms	Fax forms	Offline forms
Less than 20%				
20% to less than 40%				
40% to less than 60%				
60% to less than 80%				
80% or more				

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7. Amount of sequencing

This factor assesses the amount of the sequencing in the form. Being required to follow sequencing instructions adds to provider load (or interviewer load where interviews are used), and can lead to errors in terms of which questions are/are not completed. Forms with large amounts of sequencing may be better administered electronically, where it is assumed here that sequencing will be automated (e.g. CATI, CAPI, computerised self-administered questionnaires).

	CATI	Mail forms	Fax forms	Offline forms
None				
Low				
Moderate				
High				

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8. Proportion of items requiring record checking

This factor distinguishes questions which may be answered off-hand (such as attitudinal and behavioural questions), from questions which require checking of records, or require input from a range of other people. Most questions requiring numerical data will fall into the latter category, and are less suitable for telephone surveys, where the telephone call should be kept as short as possible.

	CATI	Mail forms	Fax forms	Offline forms
None				
Low				
About half				
High				
All				

Risk

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9. Sensitivity/confidentiality concerns

Survey respondents may be reluctant to provide honest answers to questions asking about sensitive or confidential information. Sensitive data includes anything which may be personally embarrassing for the respondent, anything that may be professionally embarrassing for the respondent, their area within the business or for the whole business, anything that may be commercial-in-confidence and so on.

Telephone surveys are the worst method for collecting sensitive data, while self-administered mail surveys are best. While fax forms and offline forms are also self-administered and therefore better than telephone surveys, the method of returning these forms may cause respondents to be more concerned about confidentiality compared with returning the paper form in a sealed envelope. For example, concerns about online security, or concerns that a fax may be received by the wrong party, mean that these methods are likely to be less suitable than mail forms for collecting sensitive information.

	CATI	Mail forms	Fax forms	Offline forms
Very low				
Low				
Medium				
High				
Very high				

10. Importance of estimates

For some surveys, it is more important that the data is of high quality than for other surveys. We should develop our expertise in new technologies on the less important surveys before we convert the more important ones.

	CATI	Mail forms	Fax forms	Offline forms
User funded				
Other ABS surveys				
Non-MEI contribute to National Accounts				
Contribute to MEI				
MEI				

Respondent characteristics

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11. Literacy of respondents

This factor considers the literacy of respondents, and is relevant for self-administered forms, where respondents must read and understand the instructions and questions without assistance from an interviewer. According to Biemer and Lyberg (2003), a general rule of thumb is that forms aimed at the general population should be at a fifth-grade reading level. The percentages below represent the proportion of respondents expected to have a reasonable level of literacy.

	CATI	Mail forms	Fax forms	Offline forms
95%-100%				
85%-94%				
75%-84%				
74% or below				

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12. Geographic location of respondents

This factor takes into account the location of the majority of respondents, and how difficult it would be for an interviewer to reach them. Mail surveys are usually more suitable than face-to-face interviews for reaching respondents in diverse geographic areas, where actually visiting the respondents would be too difficult/costly. Telephone surveys, electronic forms, and fax forms can also be suitable for reaching difficult to contact respondents, provided that respondents have telephone/internet/fax access.

	CATI	Mail forms	Fax forms	Offline forms
Metropolitan (inner and outer), with telephone/internet/fax coverage				
Metropolitan (inner and outer), without telephone/internet/fax coverage				
Rural, with telephone/internet/fax coverage				
Rural, without telephone/internet/fax coverage				

Other factors

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13. Budget

Interviewer-administered surveys are more expensive to conduct than self-administered surveys (due to training costs, travel costs, etc). Face-to-face interviews are the most expensive, followed by telephone interviews. Mail-out surveys are generally the least expensive. Applying a dollar amount to the budget available is not practical, as what is considered a large budget for one survey may be considered small for another. Therefore, the ratings used for this factor are necessarily subjective.

	CATI	Mail forms	Fax forms	Offline forms
Large				
Medium				
Small				

References

- Biemer PP & Lyberg LE (2003). *Introduction to Survey Quality*. John Wiley & Sons: Hoboken.
- Also see Mode Suitability Framework references

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- Front of Form
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Summary of Form Design Standards

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SUMMARY OF FORMS DESIGN STANDARDS

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

Introduction

The following is a summary of the design standards for ABS self completion survey forms. More detailed explanations of the standards and procedures for developing forms are provided in the earlier chapters. Note that the use of optical character recognition (OCR) on forms requires some modifications to these design standards. The standards for OCR forms are also provided in separate chapters.

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Front of form

Should be based on the standard Front Page.

Mandatory elements (must be included):

ABS logo

- The logo is included on all front page grids documents.

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Title of collection

- 36 point bold or 24 point bold; if 24 point type will not fit, shorten the title or use 18 point type

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Address box

- Position critical

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Area around address box

- Keep as clear as possible
- The instruction to quote a reference number should use 12 point plain type and be positioned above the address label
- All other instructions should be placed in a 10% screened box drawn with a 2 point white line (for forms printed in colour) or a box drawn with a 0.5 point black line (for black and white forms)
- Standard arrow heads should be used around the address label

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Statistician or Deputy Commonwealth Statistician's name

- 12 point plain leading caps only
- Following general instructions
- Left aligned with text of the mandatory elements

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Purpose of the collection

- Wording open
- Heading 12 point bold
- Text 12 point plain

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Collection authority

- Set wording to be used
- Heading 12 point bold
- Text 12 point plain

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Confidentiality

- Set wording to be used
- Heading 12 point bold
- Text 12 point plain

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Due date

- Set wording to be used
- Heading 12 point bold
- Text 12 point plain
- Date 14 point bold

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Help available

- Set wording to be used (3 format choices)
- Heading 12 point bold
- Text 12 point plain
- ABS address details included

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Contact details

- Use standard presentation
- The front page 'grids' contain a standard layout of the 'Contact details'

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Signature details

- Included in 'Contact Details' on front page.

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Form number

- 14 point bold
- Top right hand corner of the front page (inside the 5 mm text and line boundary)

Discretionary elements may be included on the front page, or on the second or later pages of the form:

Scope of the collection

Coverage of the form

Estimates

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Wording for 'Duplicate' in Address box

- 'Duplicate': 24 point bold
- 'Please keep this copy for your records': 18 point bold
- Centred within the address box

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Remainder of form layout

- Should be based on one of the standard full page, split page or OCR grids.

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Consistency

- Do all questions look like Questions? Are they all numbered in a straight numeric sequence throughout the whole form?
- Are all instructions set out in the same way?
- Are all answer spaces in a similar position on the page?

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Logical sequence

- Is any 'back tracking' required?

Page margins

- 5 mm text and line boundary
- Keep all text and answer spaces including page numbers inside these boundaries

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Page number

- 12 point plain
- Centred on the top of each page except the front page

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Lines and boxes

- Standards for drawing lines and boxes on ABS forms are:

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Alignment

- All answer boxes should be aligned to each other as much as possible by using the 'grids'

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Guide lines

- 0.5 point dotted lines as guides for writing in answer boxes
- Irregular 0.5 point dotted line as an eye-guide from the question to the answer space

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Line weights for Coloured forms

- 2 point white line for dividing columns
- 2 point white line for dividing sections
- 2 point white line for boxes containing instructions
- 0.5 point black line for answer boxes
- 1 point black line for answer boxes asking for totals

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Line weights for black and white forms

- 0.5 point black line for dividing columns
- 0.5 point black line for dividing sections
- 0.5 point black line for boxes containing instructions
- 0.5 point black line for answer box
- 1 point black line for answer box asking for a total

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Answer space

- Must be the only white area on the form (on coloured forms)
- Should be correctly aligned to grid line(s)
- 4 mm width per character in answer space
- 8 mm height for single line answer spaces and 8 mm per line in answer boxes where there is more than one line
- The bottom of the box is the last writing line

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\$,000

- A '\$' sign in 12 point plain, placed at the left outside the answer space, and
- For coloured forms, ',000' in 10 point plain type, placed at the right hand side of the answer space, with a 10% screen behind the ',000' caption
- For black and white forms, ',000' in 12 point plain type, placed at the right hand side of the answer space
- Different standards apply for matrices and columns of boxes, where the '\$,000' caption is placed above the answer spaces

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Ballot (or tick) boxes

- 4 mm square or 8mm by 4mm for No/Yes where appropriate.
- For 'No/Yes' answer boxes, the order of the 'No/Yes' choices must be consistent through the entire form
- When used with short captions, place ballot boxes approximately 3 mm to the right of captions. Longer captions should be left aligned, with the text joined to the ballot box with an eye-guide line

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Typography

- Typography standards for ABS collection form elements are:

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Upper-case Vs leading capitals

- ALL CAPITALS should not be used on ABS forms
- Use leading capitals only

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Line length of text

- Max 115 mm (at 100%)
- Equivalent to 92 mm on 80% sized draft copies

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Type face family (font)

- Verdana or
- Times

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Correct font and sizes

- Section heading - 14 point bold
- Sub-section heading - 14 point plain
- Question number - 14 point bold
- Question - 12 point bold
- Sub-question - 12 point plain (for further subsidiary questions, other standards apply)
- Instruction, Definition, Including/Excluding Note etc.
 - Heading: 10 point italics bold
 - Text: 10 point plain
 - Bullet: 10 point plain
- Bold type or type of two points larger size, may be used for emphasis of a few key words

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Major notes at beginning and completion of form

- The heading 'Please read this first' (18 point bold) should be centred above the general instructions, in an instruction box before the questions begin
- The general instructions should use 12 point plain type
- Major notes at the completion of a form should use 12 point plain type and be placed in an instruction box

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Instructions Vs Questions

- Where additional explanatory words follow immediately after the question text, these words should use 12 point plain type and be placed in brackets

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Include for exclude

- Exclude items to be included at another place on the form should be identified by a note in brackets after the 'Excluding' item

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Column headings in a matrix

- 10 point plain type centred above columns
- Placed in a box drawn with a 2 point white line, containing 10% screen for coloured forms
- Placed in a box drawn with a 0.5 point solid lines, without screens for black and white forms

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Punctuation/use of a full stop '.'

- A full stop should be used at the end of a 'Note' as it is a complete sentence
- Lists under 'Including' and 'Excluding' should not use a full stop

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Hyphens and 'en' dashes

- Hyphen used only in a word-break
- 'en' dash used for
 - sub-sub-sub-questions
 - Help available 'Telephone', 'Facsimile' and 'Mail' details
 - '(continued)'

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Abbreviations

- Use complete words such as 'for example' and 'that is' where there is sufficient space
- Only use where they are commonly understood
- Include full stops for example, 'e.g.', 'etc.', 'i.e.'

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'Questions continue over the page'

- 14 point bold
- Placed in the bottom right hand corner of page (inside the 5 mm text and line boundary)

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' (continued)'

- Use where a section or question continues over more than one page (or column)
- Repeat text of question or section heading, followed by ' (continued)'
- ' (continued)' should use same font and style as the text being repeated

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'Thank you for completing this form'

- 14 point bold, centred at end of form

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Time taken

- Use mandatory wording and layout

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Comments

- Mandatory but wording and layout negotiable

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'Go to' instruction

- 'Go to question' uses 12 point plain type, followed by the question number (only) in 14 point bold
- When 'Go to Section' or 'Go to Part', the instruction should include the section or part number as well as the word 'Section' or 'Part' as it appears on the form
- 'Go to' instruction only included where the form filler is asked to 'skip over' following questions

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Data entry or processing codes

- Use different typeface to the rest of the form, i.e. 9 point Verdana bold on form using Times, or 9 point Times on form using Verdana; or
- 9 point Verdana bold, reversed out of a solid rectangle on form using Times or Verdana
- Place data entry codes to the right of answer boxes

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Office use only boxes

- Should be drawn using a 0.5 point line
- On coloured forms, the box should sit on the 20% background screen and not contain any white space or 10% shading

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Construction and Colour

ABS standard colours, using approved colour combinations only should be used.

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Front of Form

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FRONT OF FORM

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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Introduction

This section describes the various parts of a front page and specifies those elements which are mandatory , discretionary and not permissible. The forms covered by these standards are those which are mailed or delivered to respondents. There are a number of grids available in InDesign to cater for the design of both coloured and black and white forms. The grids provide either 'Times' or 'Verdana' type face, and options for the layout of 'Help Available' details.

Diagram 2.2 (at the end of this chapter) shows the standard template for the coloured front of form page. It uses Times type face, the Australian Business Number (ABN) verification element and option 1 for the layout of the 'Help Available' details. The main paragraphs are fully-justified, which is the recommended layout for blocks of text. It is also designed for OCR readability, however check the OCR chapter for details on the latest design changes.

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Mandatory elements

ABS logo

This should be shown in the top left hand corner of the form.

Title of collection

This should be situated to the right of the ABS logo. Use 36 point bold or 24 point bold; if 24 point type will not fit, shorten the title or use 18 point type.

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Address box

The address box must include the Australia Post barcode or DPID (Delivery Point Identifier), name, and address (including the locality, state and postcode, extracted from PIMS).

The ABS standard for the maximum number of address lines, including LOCALITY STATE POSTCODE and not including DPID, is six lines.

The positioning of the address box is critical when window faced envelopes are to be used, as any information outside of the box will not be visible through the window. The address box should be positioned 24 mm from the left hand side of the survey form and 42 mm from the top of the survey form. This standard assumes an A4 form printed in portrait style.

The address box format must conform to Australia Post standards, which require:

- Clear and readable font size and text, with the characters not touching or overlapping. 12 point Courier is preferred by Australia Post, and is therefore the standard;
- LOCALITY STATE POSTCODE must be upper case (other lines should be in proper case);
- the DPID must be the first line of address information, above the name and address and left justified;
- the LOCALITY STATE POSTCODE be the last line of address information, also left justified;
- all other address lines are left justified.

Vertical spacing is largely determined by Australia Post addressing requirements and will be handled by the Data Collection Unit (DCU) as part of address printing from delimited files provided by the subject matter area.

The fixed height of an address box is therefore used as follows:

"quiet zone" (Spacing)	5 mm
---------------------------	------

DPID/reference number	6 mm
"quiet zone" (spacing)	2 mm
address information	28 mm
"quiet zone" (spacing)	5 mm
Total	46 mm

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Horizontal spacing is also largely determined by Australia Post addressing requirements and will be handled by the DCU as part of address printing from the delimited file provided by the client area. Note that:

- The Provider Integration Management System (PIMS) has a limit of 42 characters for an address line (including blanks);
- PIMS character limit on LOCALITY is 33, STATE is 3 and POSTCODE is 4; and
- a window of 103 characters will accommodate most addresses.

The fixed width of an address box is therefore used as follows:

"quiet zone" (spacing)	8 mm
DPID, address, etc.	87 mm
"quiet zone" (spacing)	8 mm
Total	103 mm

The ABS reference number is positioned in the top right hand side of the label (see Diagram 2.1).

In correspondence , please quote this number ▼

	AB12345678
J Smith Pty Limited The Manager Unit 5 101 Smith Street SMITHVILLE NSW 9999	

Diagram 2.1

The wording for duplicate forms, which is placed inside the address box, is 'Duplicate Please keep this copy for your records'.

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Area around address box

This area should be kept as clear of text and 'office use' boxes as possible. Office use boxes should only be preprinted on the forms if they are required for the majority of forms. If they are required for only a minority of cases, the office use box should be added to the form by using a stamp. These boxes should be left out wherever possible as they clutter the look of the form and are of no relevance to the respondent. Current ABS procedure of imaging most forms means these boxes are usually unnecessary.

Instructions use 10 point plain type and are placed in 10% screened boxes drawn with 2 point white lines for forms printed in colour. For forms printed in black and white, instructions should be in 10 point plain type and enclosed in a box drawn with 0.5 point black line. This presents front page instructions in a consistent way with the rest of the form. The instruction 'In correspondence, please quote this number', which is placed above the address box, is an exception to this standard due to the restricted space available. This instruction only should use 12 point plain type and be positioned across the top of the address box, beside a standard arrow.

"Please correct" box

A small instruction box should be positioned next to the address box with an arrow pointing from it to the address box. This instruction should use the words "Please correct any errors". This instruction is required for all forms except those which ask the respondent specifically about name and address details elsewhere. When ABN is not used, this box should be rectangular.

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Australian Business Number

All collections that go to a reporting unit based on an ABN are required to include a heading and a space near the address box to contain the particular businesses' preprinted ABN. This is to allow respondents to correct the ABN if necessary, and in cases where this box (which is then actually a triangle) is used the "Please correct any errors" instruction should point to both the address box and the ABN box. The ABN itself is printed in 12 point Times. Where the ABN space is used but a particular business does not need one printed, then the words "Not required" should be used in the same font.

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Statistician's name

The words:

Brian Pink
Australian Statistician

or, (for example)

Mike McGrath

should follow the general instructions used on the front page of the form. They should be in 12 point plain type and left aligned with the text of the mandatory elements.

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Purpose or scope of the collection

Information explaining the purpose or scope of the collection is used to assist the respondents in understanding the reason for the questions. The exact wording will depend on the survey, but should include what the information collected is actually used for. Providing a justification for the survey to the respondent is a valuable response inducement. Reference to where the information will be published may be included if required, but space concerns may not allow this.

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Collection authority

The standard wording is, 'The information asked for is collected under the authority of the Census and Statistics Act 1905. Your cooperation is sought in completing and returning this form by the due date. The Act provides me with the power, if needed, to direct you to provide the information sought.'

Note that it is unlikely that we would use the 'compulsory' provisions of the Act where the target population includes government organisations at the Commonwealth, State or Local level. You may therefore choose to omit the last sentence on the collection forms you send to these bodies. The last sentence should also be omitted when the collection is to be undertaken on a voluntary basis.

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Confidentiality

The standard wording is 'Your completed form remains confidential to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.'

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Due date

For the majority of forms (which are returned by mail), the standard wording is, 'Please complete this form and return it in the reply paid envelope to the Australian Bureau of Statistics by **xx Month 20xx**'. The due date itself is in 14 point bold type. Some survey areas prefer to print the due date on the basic form after it has been printed. In this case the normal background shading should still be used. It is important to specify a particular due date rather than a time period because respondents may forget when the form was received, or in the case of staggered despatches they may return the form before the end of the reference period. A combination may be used when the survey area expects that delivery of many forms may be delayed.

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Help available

An ABS address should be displayed in the Help Available instruction, on the front page or within the form. There are a number of different ways to present this information which provide for the variety of needs of collection areas and form requirements. It is possible to save space on a front page by displaying 'Help Available' details side by side. The contact area given should be the survey area, or just "the Australian Bureau of Statistics" by itself. The Economic Statistics Data Collection (ESDC) should not be mentioned in the address.

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Option 1 - 'If you have problems in completing this form, or feel that you may have difficulties meeting the due date, please contact (name of contact area) of the Australian Bureau of Statistics by:

Telephone (xx) xxxx-xxxx	Facsimile (xx) xxxx-xxxx	Mail Postal Address
or		

Option 2 - 'If you have problems in completing this form, or feel that you may have difficulties meeting the due date, please contact (name of contact area) of the Australian Bureau of Statistics by:

Telephone (xx) xxxx-xxxx
Facsimile (xx) xxxx-xxxx
Mail (Postal Address)

or

Option 3 - 'If you have problems in completing this form, or feel that you may have difficulties meeting the due date, please contact the Australian Bureau of Statistics in your State or Territory. Details are listed on page # of this form.'

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Format for telephone numbers

Telephone numbers should be formatted with spaces in the way that they are commonly used. The mobile and 1800 numbers should not have brackets around them, but STD and ISD codes do, see examples below:

- Mobile numbers - 018 xxx xxx, 015 xxx xxx or 0411 xxx xxx.
- 1800 numbers or others - 1800 xxx xxx or 0055 xxx xxx
- STD numbers - (02) xxxx xxxx or (08) xxxx xxxx
- ISD numbers - (061) (02) xxxx xxxx

1800 numbers should be followed with the label "(Freecall)" as calls to these numbers are completely free to the caller. For 13xxxx or 1300 numbers, Telstra do not have a 'standard' name. It is however a local call charge for the caller.

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ABS 'Email' addresses

ABS Email addresses should not be given as part of ABS contact information or details. The present ABS position is that unless you can communicate securely with providers, the use of email for any purpose will be seen as legitimising all forms of insecure electronic communication and will lead to (possibly unsolicited) data and other information transmission by providers.

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Contact details

This information is required to ensure confidentiality within the respondent's organisation. Contact details are requested at the foot of the front page where they will be easy for office staff to locate.

The standard wording for 'Contact Details' is, 'Person we should contact if any queries arise regarding this form' (followed by boxes containing these items):

- Name
- Telephone Number
- Signature
- Facsimile Number
- Date

A separate box for 'Position or Title' between 'Name' and 'Signature' should only be used if testing and processing of the form has shown this to be essential. Note that 'Position/Title' refers to the respondent's position or title within the business, not the general title used to indicate marital status and so on. Titles such "Mr" or "Mrs" or "Dr" or whatever for respondents to select from should not be included in the contact details.

'Mobile phone number' may be included between 'Telephone number' and 'Facsimile number' if the target population is known to be difficult to contact at a fixed location during business hours (e.g. farmers, builders, truck drivers).

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© **Commonwealth of Australia**

A copyright symbol © Commonwealth of Australia is placed at the lower left corner of the front page.

Form identifier

A form identifier is used to quickly identify a form. It should be placed on the top right corner of the front page in 14 point bold.

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Discretionary elements

There are other elements which can be placed on the front page if necessary. These are discussed below.

Coverage of the form

If there is the possibility of confusion over which business or parts of the business the form relates to, the information may be placed in a paragraph on the front page between the Collection Authority and Confidentiality paragraphs. A small instruction box with an arrow pointing to the address box, similar to the "Please correct" box, may also be used if necessary saying "Please complete this form for the Australian-based activities of the business named on this label" however it is preferred that this instruction be presented within the form.

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Estimates

An instruction to provide careful estimates if exact figures are not available may be included on the front page but is best placed close to where it is needed. Usually this is in the "Please read this first" on page 2. Information on the acceptability of 'estimates' should be considered for inclusion somewhere near the specific questions referred to particularly for matrix type questions.

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Not permissible on front page

Questions

Form designers should not include questions on the front of the form except when the questions are related to the coverage of the survey. A cluttered front page is highly undesirable and on a page that is almost entirely providing information the respondent is likely to miss any element requesting information. Respondents should also not be answering questions without having seen the general notes and reporting instructions usually presented on page 2.

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Provider email address requests

Until the ABS has the infrastructure in place to enable a move toward greater electronic communication with providers, the collection and use of email addresses will be restricted as much as possible because:

- a. some may be Hotmail or other personal address, use of which may compromise our confidentiality obligations if the recipient changes employers and we unknowingly mail them information or a query about their old job;
- b. the ABS can't handle, verify or manage email addresses systematically yet;
- c. collecting providers' email addresses may encourage them to mail ABS email addressees (possibly including data) insecurely; and
- d. having the addresses available may open the possibility of staff to using them to communicate routinely as part of survey processing.

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Website address requests

Website address requests are also restricted because:

- a. it is additional provider load for something ABS staff can search for and jump to more easily than can be scanned, repaired, stored and retrieved internally; and
- b. the Website address may not correspond to the correct statistical unit.

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Format of email addresses

If email addresses are collected on paper forms the data entry box should be a single segmented text box - i.e. not including a period to break the name up or an ampersand to separate the name from the organisation and domain. It should run the full width of the A4 page and have provision for 30 plus characters because addresses can have such different formats and lengths.

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Layout

Contents >> Paper Form Design Standards >> Layout

LAYOUT

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

Contents

- Introduction
- Page margins
- Form identifiers
- Consistency and sequence
- Helping the Respondent
- Using layout grids
 - Front page
 - Full page
 - Split page
 - Use of Matrices
- Proximity
- References

Introduction

This chapter shows you how to integrate the graphic elements discussed in later Chapters into a composite form.

Remember, you should have consulted with standards areas and finalised the form's question schedule **before** you begin design work on the layout.

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Page margins

Top	5 mm
Bottom	5 mm
Inside edge	7 mm
Outside edge	5 mm

Keep all text or answer spaces inside the boundary. On coloured forms, the background screen has to cover the A4 page boundary but should not cover more than 1/4 of the trim marks (corner marks) if these are used, (See Diagram 3.1).

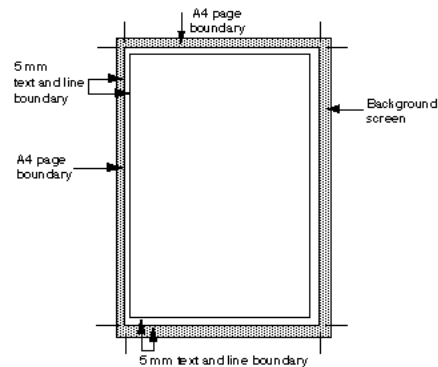


Diagram 3.1

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Form identifiers

All survey forms must include a form identifier in the top right corner of every page. On the front of the form, the identifier should be 14 point bold (see the Front of Form chapter), while on the remaining pages, it should be 12 point plain. The identifier should appear to the left of the registration mark and no higher than the page number and registration mark (Diagram 3.2).

The form identifier should include some mnemonic to assist respondent recognition and reference, especially when dealing with the ABS by telephone - for instance 'NOM32' and not 'FORM32'.

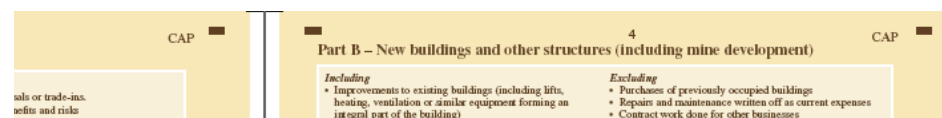


Diagram 3.2

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Consistency and sequence

You should follow two important principles in the layout of forms: consistency and logical sequence.

The layout must follow the consistent set of graphic conventions in this standard. All of the type, graphic and layout conventions used in your form must be followed consistently through the entire form. Lack of consistency will lead to errors and increased processing costs.

The sequence in which material is presented on the form should be the same as the sequence in which you expect respondents to work

through the form. For example, do not separate notes from questions. Do not expect respondents to backtrack through the form or to follow a non-sequential route. They must always move forward one step at a time. Breaks in the linear sequence will give rise to respondent errors.

If you want respondents to read particular instructions before they answer a question, place them immediately after the question (see Diagram 3.3) and before or to the left of the answer box. Instruction boxes should never be below the answer box or respondents will answer the question without reading the instruction.

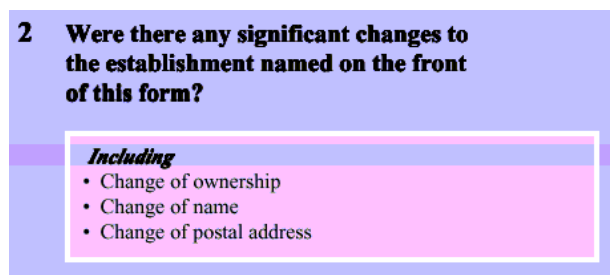


Diagram 3.3

In general it is strongly recommended that explanatory notes are not presented all together at the beginning or the end of a form unless they apply to most of the questions. Separating instructions (notes, includings and excludings, definitions etc) from the questions discourages respondents from reading them at all, especially if they are after the relevant questions rather than before them. No-one likes having to flip back and forth between pages, or if the notes are separated completely, looking back and forth over two pages as this is too wide a visual field.

Presenting instructions all in one block also encourages the more diligent respondent to try and read them all at once. Processing them this way and then trying to remember everything is a much more difficult task than reading each instruction right before the question and only having to remember each bit for a few seconds.

In those few cases where separating the notes is necessary, it is preferred that they are presented at the beginning of the form. In that case the respondent will see that the notes exist as they go sequentially through the pages, and they will at least skim over the notes to get a general idea what is in them before beginning the questions.

One reason a forms designer might put all the instructions at the beginning of a form is when the respondent needs to know what is required for different parts of the form, so they don't put their data in the wrong place. In this situation it might be more appropriate to use a contents list, generally formed from section or part headings. Contents on ABS forms should generally not use page numbers as they are intended as overviews only, not to help respondents skip to sections they are interested in. Contents lists can be used whenever a form is reasonably long or contains modules of quite distinct topics (see Diagram 3.4).

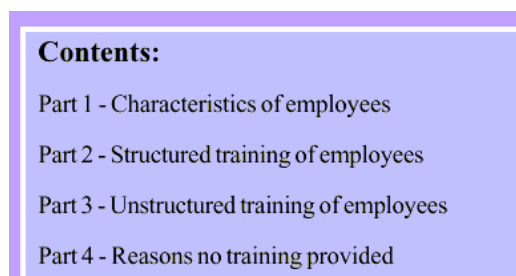


Diagram 3.4

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Helping the Respondent

In order to obtain accurate data, the respondent has to be motivated to provide it. One way of motivating the respondent is to make the form interesting to complete. This can be done through graphical presentation: the use of space, layout and colours.

The answer boxes should allow sufficient space for a high percentage of likely answers, e.g. providing a space 8 mm high and 4 mm wide for each handwritten letter will accommodate over 80% of handwriting styles. On this basis, for example where one answer is usually 3 digits, sometimes 4 and in exceptional cases 12 digits, it would be reasonable to allow for a four digit answer 8 mm x 16 mm (i.e. 4 x 4 mm) and not necessary to provide 8 mm x 48 mm (12 x 4 mm). As well as wasting space, providing for the largest possible answer creates large white boxes. The respondent sees the number and sizes of the answer spaces (white boxes) as an immediate indication of the amount of 'work' or 'effort' involved in completing the form.

Poor use of any forms design element, be it language, question sequencing, layout etc., creates an obstacle for the respondent. Each obstacle may be only minor, but they all accumulate in the person's mind until a point is reached when they become too much and the person no longer cares about what goes on the form. This point is known as the *fatigue point*, and its presence can be quite marked.

After this point has been reached the quality of responses to questions diminishes noticeably. It is therefore important to keep to a minimum the possible sources of aggravation for the respondent so that the form is filled in before the fatigue point is reached. Apart from ensuring that good form design principles are adhered to, anything that is not essential to the form-filling activity (and to the other functions of the form) should be removed.

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Using layout grids

A layout grid is a plan that gives you the positions on a page for each of the graphic elements of the form. The grids will help you achieve consistent layouts. There is a separate grid available in InDesign for each type of page on the form.

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Front page

The layout grid for the front page is designed for both single and double column layouts. Single column layouts are preferred for the front page because this allows a less cluttered appearance. Chapter 2 shows how a front page is constructed, including more detail about each

of the elements which may be included on a front page.

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Full page

The full page layout creates a spread-out arrangement of questions that is often the most attractive layout. The grid for the full page allows for the incorporation of notes alongside answer boxes.

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Split page

The split page is an alternative which has some advantages over the full page as it offers a better use of space particularly where a great many short questions and answers are used. It gives a more clearly structured linear design for respondents to follow. The short line width is easier for respondents to read. The split page cannot be used where there is a need for an answer box or matrix crossing the full width of the page.

Do not mix single column and double column designs on the one page as the mix of layouts may lead to some instructions or questions being overlooked. A split page layout above a full page layout is likely to cause a large number of respondents to overlook the right hand column at the top of the page. Similarly, response options that go across the page rather than down should be avoided because the layout contrast to the rest of the form forces the respondent into a different reading pattern that can lead to error.

Using some pages with a single column layout and some with a double column layout in the one form is acceptable if necessary as long as the layout does not change too often. Do not use triple columns.

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Use of matrices

A matrix is an answer box divided into two or more columns, which may be grouped together under a hierarchy of column headings, with a set of sub-questions listed down the left hand side of the answer box. When using a matrix it is difficult to place instructions with the questions they refer to. That is why forms that use matrices are one exception to the rule against the separation of instructions from their questions.

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Proximity

The Gestalt law of proximity (see Jenkins and Dillman, 1997) states that when similar items are located in close proximity they are seen as belonging together. Arranging the elements on a form carefully so that the right parts are seen as a group is essential in aiding completion of the form. All the elements within a question: the question text, the notes, the answer options and the answer boxes, should all be closer to each other vertically than they are to surrounding questions so the respondent can see the question as a whole.

An example of the violation of this law is shown below (see Diagram 3.5). Note that the answer box for question 8 vertically overlaps the top of the text of question 9. This proximity to the elements of question 9 rather than to the other elements of question 8 makes it difficult for someone reading this to determine which question the answer box belongs to.

8 Floor area created by the job

Excluding

- Any part of the building not bounded by external walls, e.g. carports, pergolas.

9 What is the actual or expected month of completion?

mm / yy yy

Square metres

Diagram 3.5

Proximity also guides the order in which a respondent will read elements within a question. If a question requires a response for each of several categories that are presented in a grid (see Diagram 3.6) it is important that the respondent's eye is guided in the right direction. If the respondent is supposed to read the items across the page, there must be less space between columns than between the rows, and vice versa when the respondent should read down the page.

1 Estimated number of visitors to this amusement or theme park during the following months

July 2001 August 2001 September 2001

October 2001 November 2001 December 2001

Diagram 3.6

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References

- Jenkins, Cleo R., & Dillman, Don A. (1997) "Towards a theory of self-administered questionnaire design" *Survey Measurement and Process Quality*, Lyberg et al (eds), John Wiley & Sons, 165-195.

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Lines and Boxes

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LINES AND BOXES

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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- Ruled lines
 - Dividing columns
 - Dividing sections
 - Defining boxes containing instructions
 - Defining answer box boundaries
 - Guide lines for writing in answer boxes
 - Eye-guides between text and answer spaces
- Width of instruction boxes
- Answer spaces
- Dollar thousands (\$,000's)
- Other units of measurement
- Answer boxes using matrices
- Ballot (or tick) boxes
- Conclusion

Ruled lines

When drawing your form keep the amount of ink on the form to the minimum necessary for the form to work properly.

Every extra bit of ink on the form is looked at and evaluated by the respondent. If it is not necessary and has to be (mentally) discarded, it contributes only to the respondent load and to the subsequent detriment of the data quality.

The basic principle you should always follow is to use as few lines as is absolutely necessary. The lines you use should be no thicker than is needed to do the job and should be consistent throughout the form.

You can use lines for several purposes on forms. These are shown below. The thickness of the lines varies depending on whether a coloured or a black and white form is used. Line thickness can be specified in InDesign.

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Dividing columns

A line used for dividing columns should be used for all split page layouts. The line should begin at the top of the first line of type (or the top of any boxes) and end at the bottom of the last line of type (or the base of any boxes) (see Diagram 4.1).

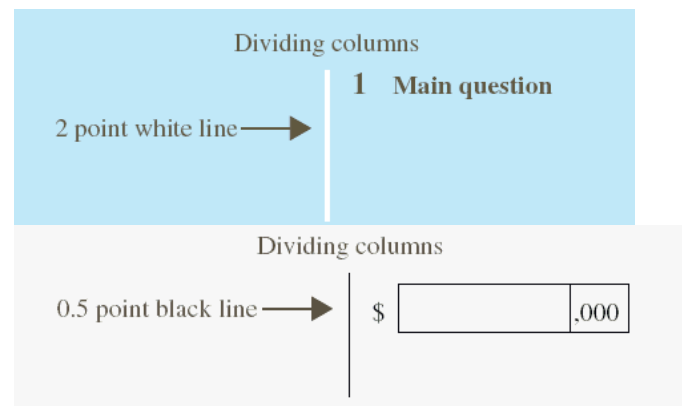


Diagram 4.1

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Dividing sections

For a full page layout, the ends of a line used for dividing sections should be both left and right aligned with the widest spaced objects on a page (see Diagram 4.2). For a split page layout, the section dividers and column dividers should join neatly, but ensure they don't form a cross (section dividers in both columns meeting), otherwise respondents may incorrectly read across the page rather than down. Section dividers should only be used when necessary for easy navigation of a form, and when used they should be consistent throughout the form.

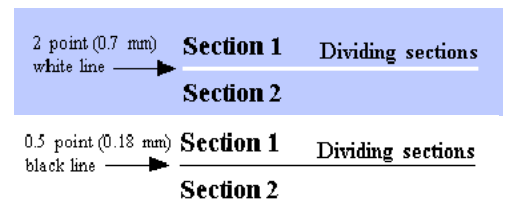


Diagram 4.2

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Defining boxes containing instructions

Boxes containing instructions should have a 2 point white line around them for coloured forms, and a 0.5 black line for black and white forms (see Diagram 4.3).

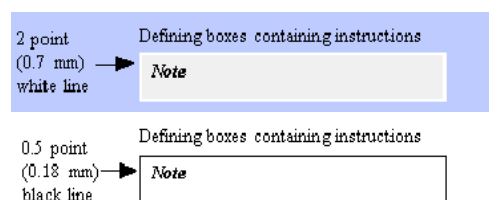


Diagram 4.3

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Defining answer box boundaries

The 0.5 point line is used for normal answer boxes on both coloured and black and white forms (see Diagram 4.4). This line is in solid drop-out colour for OCR forms and black for other forms. Boundaries for "Total" answer boxes should be 1 point so they stand out more.

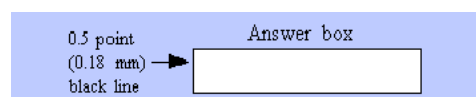


Diagram 4.4

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Guide lines for writing in answer boxes

The 0.5 point regular dotted line is used for guide lines on both coloured and black and white forms (see Diagram 4.5).

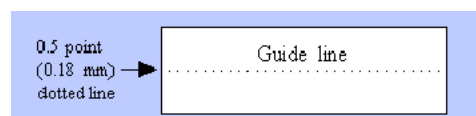


Diagram 4.4

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Eye-guides between text and answer spaces

The 0.5 point irregular dotted line (usually three dots then a space) is used for eye-guide lines on both coloured and black and white forms to link the text with the answer box (see Diagram 4.6).

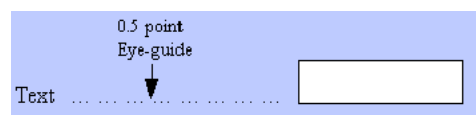


Diagram 4.6

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Width of instruction boxes

In setting out boxes of instructions the principle to be applied is that a form should use as few different alignments as possible and that similar elements are shown consistently throughout the form. 'Note' boxes, where two columns of text are used, should extend to the full useable width of the page where possible.

Instruction boxes, including 'Including/Excluding' boxes, and 'Note', 'Definition' and 'Examples' boxes can go the full width of the page or slightly less to incorporate an answer box to the right. When different kinds of instructions are used in the one form, they should all be the same width. When only an Including or an Excluding is contained in a box rather than both, the box should still be the same width as if there were both. The information should be presented in the same way as usual next to a space, so that all includings in the form are aligned with each other and all excludings are also aligned (see Diagram 4.7).

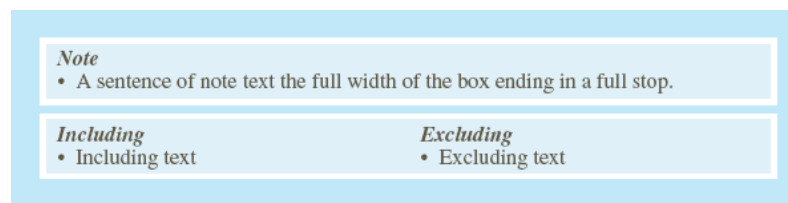


Diagram 4.7

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Answer spaces

All answer spaces should be white and bounded by a continuous solid line of the appropriate thickness, see above.

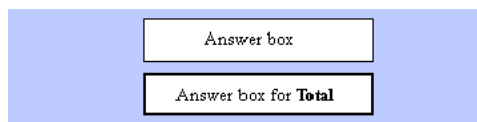


Diagram 4.8

Allow 4 mm width per character in answer spaces (see Diagram 4.9). Sufficient width should be allowed for the number of characters expected in the majority of cases, rather than the largest possible answer.

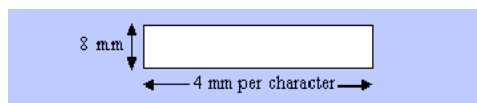


Diagram 4.9

Allow 8 mm height for answer spaces and 8 mm for each line in answer boxes where there is more than one line (see Diagram 4.10). Note that the line forming the base of the answer box is used as an answer space.

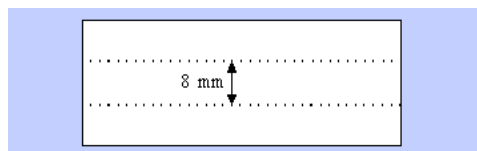


Diagram 4.10

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Dollar thousands (\$,000's)

Where financial items are used, answers should generally be stated in thousands of dollars. Most ABS forms use dollar thousands so this is preferred for consistency, especially when many businesses receive several ABS forms and they can have an impact on the quality of each other. In general, amounts rounded to the nearest whole dollar are more accurate than is actually needed, and is therefore unnecessary respondent burden. Rounding to dollars should only be used when very small values are expected from a significant number of respondents *and* it is important to know how many respondents are involved in that particular economic activity, regardless of the size of their contribution.

Where space allows, the answer boxes should contain the following captions:

- A '\$' sign in 12 point plain type, placed at the left hand side of the answer space, and
- For forms with background colours, the characters ',000' in 10 point plain type, placed at the right hand side of the answer space, with a 10% screen placed under the ',000'.
- For forms without background colours, the characters ',000' in 12 point plain type, placed at the right hand side of the answer space.

This standard clarifies the correct presentation and placement of the '\$,000' caption, when used in an answer space (see Diagram 4.11).



Diagram 4.11

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Where there is insufficient space within an answer box, or where a column of answer boxes or a matrix is used, the caption '\$,000' should be placed above the column of answer boxes.

There are four options for the presentation of these captions:

- For coloured forms, the headings should either use 10 point plain type, placed in a 10% screened box drawn with 2 point white lines. Alternatively, use 12 point type, placed on the 20% background screen (see Diagram 4.12).

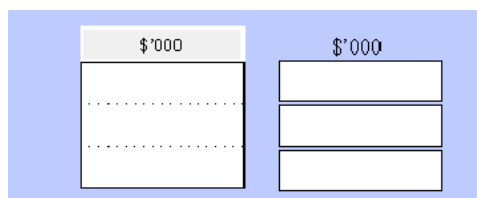


Diagram 4.12

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- For black and white forms, the heading should be in 10 point plain type, placed in a box drawn with a 0.5 point black line, or use 12 point type, placed above the answer box, with no box around it (see Diagram 4.13).

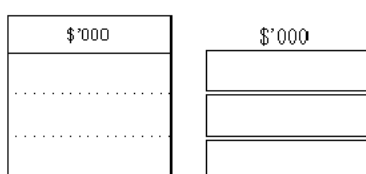


Diagram 4.13

Other units of measurement

Whenever relevant, other units of measurement should also be presented next to the answer box. Some examples include: questions that ask for weight of production, construction area added, or size of property reported for should include kg, m² and ha respectively to the right of the answer box to make it clearer for the respondent what is required.

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Answer boxes used in matrices

Where a mix of box sizes are being used in one question in a matrix format, the boxes should be left aligned with each other, especially if following on from another column of boxes to lead the eye across. See for example, Diagram 4.14.

Where different levels of a measurement unit are used, for example kilograms and tonnes, and the boxes for the lower level unit allow for more digits than the higher level, the boxes should be left aligned with enough digit spaces so that the orders of magnitude match and the commas line up e.g. the 1 in 1 tonne will line up with the 1 in 1,000 kg. Where the answer boxes are the same size, due to expectations about the answers respondents will give, matching the order of magnitude is not necessary but commas should still align.

Diagram 4.14 shows a matrix of answer boxes for two questions: 'Area sown' and 'Total production'. The 'Area sown' column has four rows, each with a box for 'ha' (hectares) and a box for '0'. The 'Total production' column has four rows, each with a box for 'kg' (kilograms) and a box for '0'. The boxes are left-aligned, and the units are aligned to the right of the boxes.

Diagram 4.14

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Ballot (or tick) boxes

Use 4mm or 5mm (for OCR forms) square ballot boxes for most closed questions (see Diagram 4.15). Ballot boxes smaller than 4 mm are difficult to use and boxes above this size may lead respondents to write in the box. Place ballot boxes approximately 3 mm to the right of short captions (including 'No/Yes' captions).

When using 'No/Yes' options with sequencing instructions it is generally better to put the answer with the skip first. This saves the respondent from reading the rest of the question when it does not apply to them. In the absence of such instructions it is better to put the least desirable answer first. Few questions in ABS business surveys are particularly sensitive, so the usual socially desirable behaviour respondents may indulge in is acquiescence, or agreeing to everything. This is why standard 'No/Yes' questions without sequencing instructions should place the 'No' first. Whichever convention you adopt, do so consistently throughout the form.

Diagram 4.15 shows a ballot box for a 'No/Yes' question. The 'No' option is followed by a blue ballot box and the text 'Go to Question 6'. The 'Yes' option is followed by a white ballot box.

Diagram 4.15

The gap between the 'No/Yes' text and a ballot box should be no more than about 5 mm. The 'No/Yes' options may be left aligned with the question text when the question text is short and there are no note boxes in between. Otherwise position the 'No/Yes' text further to the right so that the reader's eye may travel from the question number at the top left of the question to the ballot boxes and any sequencing instructions at the bottom right.

Longer options, of about four words or more, should be left aligned and the tick boxes should be right aligned with the other answer spaces. In general most of the answer spaces on a form should be aligned, especially those for the same kind of data items, for example all financial boxes should be aligned and all lists of 'tick all that apply' boxes should be aligned but it is not necessary for the financial boxes to align with the tick boxes if that is detrimental to readability. An eye-guide line should be bottom-aligned and connect each caption with the related tick box (see Diagram 4.16).

Diagram 4.16 shows a question '2 What is your age?' with a 'Tick one box' instruction. The options are listed on the left, and the corresponding tick boxes are on the right. The options are: 'Less than 20 years', '20 years - less than 25 years', '25 years - less than 35 years', '35 years - less than 45 years', '45 years - less than 55 years', and '55 years and over'.

Diagram 4.16

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Conclusion

The consistent use of standard lines and boxes will improve the appearance of a form and contribute to reducing respondent fatigue and errors.

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Typography

Contents >> Paper Form Design Standards >> Typography

TYPOGRAPHY

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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- Thank you for completing this form
- Respondent comments
- Time taken
- Go to
- Arrow head
- Wording in address box
- Summary
- References

Introduction

Typography is the art of organising the printed word on a page. To use typographic contrast effectively, it is essential to use it in a consistent and controlled way. The terms and their application in this standard are explained below.

The controlled use of type faces is an important aid to guiding a respondent through the form. The basic rule is this: whatever type family you use for the questions on the form, use the other for parts of the form set aside for other purposes. If using Verdana for the questions, use Times for administrative functions such as 'Office Use' boxes. Respondents tend to recognise patterns within forms subconsciously, and will follow them.

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Upper-case vs leading capitals

Upper-case text has been proved to be difficult to read, especially for large amounts of text. The reason for this is that words lose their shapes, all becoming converted to rectangles. This can be seen in the paragraph below.

THIS PARAGRAPH IS WRITTEN IN UPPER-CASE. THE WORDS LOSE THEIR DISTINCTIVE SHAPES AND SO TAKE LONGER TO RECOGNISE, THUS READING IS MADE MORE DIFFICULT. THIS ADDS TO RESPONDENT FATIGUE AND IS LIKELY TO CREATE RESPONSE PROBLEMS.

The words lose their distinctive shapes and so take longer to recognise, thus reading is made more difficult. This adds to respondent fatigue and is likely to create response problems. Therefore you should set text in lower case, using capitals for the start of key words in form titles, the first letters of sentences, section headings and captions. You can also use capitals for the first letter of appropriate names, titles, and abbreviations. Do not set whole words in capitals.

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Underlining words

Underlining also interferes with the ability of people to use the shape of a word to assist reading, though not as badly as using upper-case. Only the underlining of key words has been permitted on ABS forms, and only when emphasis is essential for data quality. Even this limited use is now discouraged due to the recently emerged standard in electronic documents. Electronic documents use underlining to indicate a hypertext link. The ABS has begun to develop electronic forms and using different methods of emphasis in the electronic version of a form compared to the paper form is undesirable. It is therefore recommended that ABS forms use the other methods of emphasis detailed below rather than underlining.

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Alignment of type (justification)

Columns of text can be aligned on a page so that they have a straight edge on the left, on the right or on both the left and right. Text can also be arranged so that all lines are set about a mid point. The process of aligning text is called justifying. For research on justification, see for example Wheildon (1990).

Text is fully justified when the columns of text align to both left and right margins. In order to make the lines of equal length the spacing between words is adjusted or long words at the end of lines are hyphenated. The word spacing used in fully justified text can create an untidy (and difficult to read) arrangement of words and spaces in small blocks of text, as in the example below (see Diagram 5.1), making this alignment of type unsuitable for most of the text of ABS forms but suitable for the front page.

Text is fully justified when columns of text align on both the left and right margins. In order to make the lines of equal length the spacing between words is adjusted or long words at the end of lines are hyphenated

Diagram 5.1

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Text is left aligned (justified) right ragged when only the left margin follows a straight line. Word spacing remains constant, the right margin remains ragged, and the line finishes at the word break closest to the maximum line width, as in Diagram 5.2.

Text is left justified and right ragged when text aligns on the left side and is ragged on the right hand side. Word spacing remains constant, the right margins remains ragged

Diagram 5.2

Left justified text is preferred for most parts of ABS forms. Line length can be adjusted to suit available space and it is possible to avoid awkward breaks in phrases and sentences which poor readers find particularly difficult. If text is fully justified (as mentioned above), awkward hyphenation and word spacing are often necessary to fill up a line, making reading difficult.

Text set left aligned right ragged, with eye guides, is required on ABS forms for response options that have captions of about four words or more (see Diagram 5.3).

Less than 20 years		☐
20 years – less than 25 years		☐
25 years – less than 35 years		☐
35 years – less than 45 years		☐
45 years – less than 55 years		☐
55 years and over		☐

Diagram 5.3

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Eye-guides consist of an irregular dotted line to avoid any confusion with the regular dotted lines used in answer spaces.

Text is right aligned (justified) left ragged when only the right margin follows a straight line. Word spacing remains constant, the left margin remains ragged, and the line begins at the word break nearest to the maximum line width, as in Diagram 5.4.

Text is right justified and left ragged when text aligns on the right side and is ragged on the left and side. Word spacing remains constant, the right margin remains ragged.

Diagram 5.4

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If the form contains a large number of tick boxes in a vertical row, preceded by short captions, these should be right aligned, with 3 mm between the captions and the answer boxes (see Diagram 5.5).

0 – 25 km	☐
26 – 50 km	☐
51 – 100 km	☐
101 – 250 km	☐
Over – 250 km	☐
Don't know	☐

Diagram 5.5

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Text is centred (or centre justified), when each line is centred about a mid point. The length of each line is independent as in Diagram 5.6. Centre justification is used on ABS forms for elements such the "Please read this first" instruction heading.

Text is centre justified, or centred when each line is centred about a mid point. The length of each line is independent.

Diagram 5.6

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Which ever alignment of captions is used on a form, it is preferable that it be applied consistently, rather than having a mixture of methods on the one form. However it is not necessary that all answer boxes in the one form are aligned with each other, some may be arranged further in than the page margins for readability and so on. It is recommended that the answer boxes for similar types of caption are aligned throughout a form so that for example, all the financial items line up and all the no/yes options line up. This graphical presentation helps inform the respondent what kind of response they need to give.

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Line length of text

One of the most important principles when laying out the form is to keep line lengths short. Eyes have a clear focused range of only a few degrees. This means that it takes several eyeball movements to scan a line of text.

More than two or three such movements may lead to eye fatigue. There is a subsequent tendency for people to lose track of which line they are reading. This leads to backtracking through the text, or misinterpretation.

With a 10 to 12 point text, a suitable line length is about 110 mm, and should not exceed 115 mm. On ABS forms this includes questions, headings, text within notes boxes, all use of text. No line of text should exceed 115mm.

When shortening a text block to fit within the maximum recommended line length, be aware of awkward sentence breaks, e.g. do not break a date (25 December 2004) over two lines and avoid having only one word on a new line.

In questions, always allow the top line to overhang a bottom line. This prevents a poor reader from skipping from the end of the first line to the end of the second without reading the intervening words.

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Typeface

For ABS collection forms you can use one of two typeface families, Times or Verdana (see Diagram 5.7.1).

This text is written in Times font. Notice the serifs on the extremities of the letters

This text is written in Verdana font. Notice there are no serifs on the extremities of the letters.

Diagram 5.7.1

You should never mix them together on the same form, except as directed below. These typefaces have been selected because of their legibility and general availability. Times is a serif face, Verdana is a sans serif (without serifs) face. The serifs are the little curls at the extremities of letters. In general, large slabs of text are more readable when set in serif faces. However, for short lines of text, such as those typically found on forms, Verdana is more legible.

Use either Verdana or Times on forms with simple questions and notes. Use Times on forms with long explanations or notes because Verdana is not suitable for long passages of prose. Whichever typeface family you choose for the respondents, use the alternative face for data entry or processing codes and 'Office Use' boxes.

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Form titles

Use 36 point bold for forms with short titles (see Diagram 5.7.2). If you do not have enough space for the title on one line use 24 point bold (see Diagram 5.8).

Title of Collection
(36 point bold)

Diagram 5.7.2

Title of Collection
(24 point bold)

Diagram 5.8.

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Form sub-titles

If you still haven't enough room for the title on one line, then your title is probably too long and should be shortened or shown as a heading followed by a sub-title. When used, sub-titles should be in 18 point bold type (see Diagram 5.9).

Sub-title of Collection

(18 point bold)

Diagram 5.9

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Section headings

When used, section headings should be in 14 point bold (see Diagram 5.10).

Section heading

(14 point bold)

Diagram 5.10

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Sub-section headings

Sub-section headings should be in 14 point plain (see Diagram 5.11). As these can be lost within the question text, they should only be used when necessary and should be reasonably long, preferably more than one word.

Sub-section heading

(14 point plain)

Diagram 5.11

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Questions

Set main questions in 12 point bold. Where key words require greater emphasis or contrast, bold italics may be used. Alternatively type size can be increased by 2 points. (see change Diagram 5.12). This kind of emphasis should only be used for one or two words in a question or the reduction in readability is counter-productive to the aim of emphasising the words.

Questions (12 point bold)	Questions (14 point bold)	<i>Questions</i> (14 point bold italic)
-------------------------------------	-------------------------------------	---

Diagram 5.12

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Sub-questions

Sub-questions (subsidiary questions) should use 12 point plain type, aligned to the same grid line as the question text. Sub-sub-questions use 12 point plain type and are indented to the next grid line. Sub-sub-sub-questions should use 12 point plain type and are indented to the same grid line as sub-sub-questions, with the text placed after an 'n' dash (see Diagram 5.13).

Question text	(12 point bold)
Sub-question	(12 point plain)
Sub-sub-question	(12 point plain)
– Sub-sub-sub-question (en dash)	(12 point plain)

Diagram 5.13

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Question numbers

Question numbers should be set in 14 point bold, with the first digit of a two digit question number left aligned to the first grid line and single digit numbers sitting one letter space to the right of the first grid line (see Diagram 5.14).

9	Question number with the main question
10	Question number with the main question

Diagram 5.14

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Major notes at beginning and end of form

Any 'general notes' for respondents before the questions begin, should be larger than the remainder of notes on the form. For forms printed in colour, these instructions should be set in 12 point plain type, placed in a 10% screened box drawn with a 2 point white line. For forms printed in black and white, use 12 point plain type placed in a box drawn with a 0.5 point black line. This layout gives greater impact to general notes, while maintaining the graphical standards used for all other notes throughout the form. Add 'Please read this first' in 18 point bold as a general instruction heading above the general instruction, centred inside the top of the instruction box at the top of the page (see Diagram 5.15).

Please read this first

- **Important:** This form will be read using electronic equipment.
- Use only black ball point pen when completing this form.
- Information reported on this form should comply with the Australian equivalents to International Financial Reporting Standards (AIFRS).
- Report wholesale values for items listed.

Diagram 5.15

Major notes at the completion of the form e.g. instructions on return procedures, should follow the same style (described above), with an appropriate heading.

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Column headings in a matrix

For colour forms, matrix headings should be set in 10 point plain type, centred above the column(s) they refer to. Headings should be placed in a 10% screened box, drawn with a 2 point white line. One point white lines should also be used to separate the sub-headings between columns (see Diagram 5.16).

Number working full-time	
Male	Female

Diagram 5.16

For black and white forms, matrix headings should be set in 10 point plain type, centred above the column(s) they refer to. Headings should be placed in a box, drawn with a 0.5 point black line (see Diagram 5.17).

Number working full-time	
Male	Female

Diagram 5.17

The text of each matrix heading should be short and never contain more words than the actual question text.

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Instructions, explanations and notes within questions

For forms printed in colour, the 'Including', 'Excluding' and 'Note' headings should be set in 10 point bold italics type, the bullet in 10 point plain and text of the instruction in 10 point plain, placed in a box filled with a 10% screen and drawn with a 2 point white line (see Diagram 5.18).

<i>Including, Excluding, Note, Definition (10 point bold italics)</i>
• Text of note (10 point plain)

Diagram 5.18

Forms printed in black and white use the same type styles, with instructions placed in a box drawn with a 0.5 point black line, without a 10% screen (see Diagram 5.19).

<i>Including, Excluding, Note, Definition (10 point bold italics)</i>
• Text of note (10 point plain)

Diagram 5.19

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Includes for excludes

Where an item listed as an excluding is to be recorded at another place on the form, an instruction can be added in brackets to indicate where the item should be included (see Diagram 5.20). "Include in Question xx" as shown should be used when all of the data related to that item should be included in that question. In other cases, where the respondent will need to read the instructions for the other question, "See Question xx" may be more appropriate.

<i>Excluding (10 point bold italics)</i>
• Depreciation (include in Question xx) (10 point plain)

Diagram 5.20

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Instruction vs questions

Instructions and questions are displayed using two different graphic standards (i.e. 10 point plain type in a 10% screened box, and 12 point bold type respectively). Often, however, when using 'abbreviated questions' more information is added which could either be interpreted as part of the question, or as an instruction. The extra words may be procedural information e.g. "Total (sum of Questions xx to xx)", or a single include or example, or a short definition and so on. Where additional words follow the question they should be in 12 point plain type in brackets immediately after the question (see Diagram 5.21). Long questions should be broken up in this fashion as it is more readable than several lines of bold text.

15 Contribution or premium income (net of reinsurance premiums paid, unearned premium movements and underwriting expenses)

Diagram 5.21

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Bullets: Bullets (dot points) should be the same size as the text they accompany, e.g. bullets in a list of 'Includes' should be 10 point. Bullets should be left aligned under the beginning of the heading text.

Punctuation: Instructions presented as 'Notes' on a form, should be written as complete sentences, with full stops being used. However, 'Includes' and 'Excludes' are presented as lists and should not use full stops. Only simple punctuation should be used on ABS forms.

Hyphens and 'en' dashes: A hyphen is correctly used only within a word-break, whereas an 'en' () dash is slightly larger and more correctly used for graphic purposes such as in forms design. For indented lines of text such as presenting sub-sub-sub-questions, an 'en' () dash should be used.

Use of Latin and abbreviations: Latin abbreviations such as 'i.e.', 'e.g.' and 'etc.' should only be used where there is insufficient space for the complete words 'that is' and 'for example' or where you are confident that they are commonly understood. Where abbreviations are used, full stops should be included as shown in the preceding examples. Latin terms such as "ad hoc" should always be italicised. Similar to abbreviations, the use of symbols as short forms of words should be avoided unless well understood by respondents.

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Data entry or processing codes

On forms using Times, use 9 point Verdana for all processing codes; on forms with Verdana, use 9 point Times. Whichever font you use plain, italics, bold or bold italics do so consistently so that the same function is always represented in the same font (see Diagram 5.22). It is preferable that data entry codes are printed in drop-out colour so they are less obvious to respondents.

041W Data entry code in Verdana (9 point)

or

041W Data entry code in Times (9 point)

Diagram 5.22

Data entry codes can also use 9 point Verdana bold type, reversed out of a solid rectangle (see Diagram 5.23). When using this method, use Verdana regardless of which font you use for the rest of the form. The advantage of using this method is that readers tend to overlook areas of reverse type, yet it is easily recognised during data capture. Data entry codes are placed to the right hand side of answer boxes for the same reason.

059K

Diagram 5.23

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Office use only box

Where an office use box is used it should not stand out from the background screen (shading) on coloured forms, i.e. it should not use white answer spaces but should be 'clear' filled and shown in the background only (see Diagram 5.24). The lines of the boxes themselves should be in solid background colour. The text should be 9 point or less.

Office use only	
BSN	
ADJ	
BLT	

Diagram 5.24

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Form ID

The form identification should be 14 point bold, and placed on the top right hand corner of the front page, at least 6mm below the 10mm top page margin.

Form ID, RD101, MV4-C

(14 point bold)

Diagram 5.25

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Page number

Page numbers should be set in 12 point plain, to be centred on the top of each page except the front page, with the top of the number 5 mm above the 10mm text and line boundary. Blank pages, such as at the end of a form, should still have page numbers and for scanning purposes may need numbers at both the top and bottom of the page.

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Questions continue

Where a note is required to tell respondents that 'Questions continue over the page', this instruction should be in 14 point bold type (see Diagram 5.26) in the bottom right hand corner of the page.

Questions continue over the page

(14 point bold)

Diagram 5.26

Where a section or question continues over more than one page (or column), the text of the heading or question may be repeated at the top of the new page (or column), followed by an 'en' dash and '(continued)' (see Diagram 5.27). The word 'continued' should use the following standard:

- same type size as the text being repeated,
- italic type style,
- brackets in italic type, and
- lower case type.

– *(continued)*

Diagram 5.27

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Thank you for completing this form

Where a form has sufficient space for a note to thank respondents, this instruction should be set in 14 point bold type and centred at the end of the form (see Diagram 5.28).

Thank you for completing this form

(14 point bold)

Diagram 5.28

Do not put the "end" of a form anywhere other than the last page. Even if sequencing means that certain respondents answer fewer questions than others, do not put a "Thank you for completing this form" instruction anywhere within the body of the form. Sequence those respondents to the physical end of the form, assigning a question number to the "Thank you" if necessary. Having an early "end" within the form encourages respondents to give the responses that allow them to answer fewer questions.

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Respondent comments

It is required that comments from the respondent are requested at the end of ABS business forms, as the second last question. It is recommended that the question shown in Diagram 5.29 be used, or see the section on Optical Character Recognition(OCR forms). This question should be set in 12 point bold and followed by as much space as is considered adequate. This allows respondents to provide information on the three different aspects. This wording may be tailored depending on collection specific needs, in addition to general comments on the form. The question may be used to ask specifically about data, such as changes since last quarter, but it is preferred that such issues are asked about separately where space allows.

Please provide comments

- on any of the information you have supplied on this form
- on any questions which cause problems
- if you would like to suggest improvements to this form

Diagram 5.29

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Time taken

The question asking for an estimate of the time taken to complete a form is also a required element in ABS business forms. This should be the last question in the form. The following wording should be used: "Please provide an estimate of the time taken to complete this form" (see Diagram 5.30).

An instruction box should provide the following text:

"Including

- The time actually spent reading the instructions, working on the questions and obtaining the information
- The time spent by all employees in collecting and providing this information"

A single answer box should contain the captions 'hrs' and 'mins' set in 12 point plain. Separate boxes for hours and minutes with their captions to the right of each box is also acceptable.

Please provide an estimate of the time taken to complete this form

Including

- The time actually spent reading the instructions, working on the questions and obtaining the information
- The time spent by all employees in collecting and providing this information

hrs mins

Diagram 5.30

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Go to

'Go to' instructions can be presented in two ways. The entire text of a 'Go to' instruction can be in 12 point plain type followed by the question number only in 14 point bold type (see Diagram 5.31). Alternatively, the word 'question' in 12 point plain can be replaced by an upper case 'Q' in 14 point bold type (see Diagram 5.32).

No ☐  Go to Question **6**

Yes ☐

Diagram 5.31

Yes ☐  Go to **Q8**

No ☐

Diagram 5.32

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A 'Go to' instruction should only be included where the respondent is asked to 'skip over' the following question. An instruction is not required to tell the respondent to go to the next question as respondents will automatically go on if not told to do anything else. It is preferred that any unnecessary elements on a form be avoided. Be careful when placing a sequencing instruction towards the bottom of a page as the respondent may not see it.

Where a respondent is asked to go to a particular 'Section' or 'Part' of a form, the 'Go to' instruction should include the section or part number (or letter) as it appears on the form. This method of sequencing will generally be needed if it is important the respondent reads the section title and any section-specific notes before starting the next question. The text of a 'Go to' instruction should be in 12 point plain type followed by the heading 'Section 9' or 'Part 9' in 14 point bold type (see Diagram 5.33). See also 'Filter Questions' and 'Use of sections or parts' in Chapter 6.

No ☐  Go to **Section 9**

Yes ☐

Diagram 5.33

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When more than one answer option in a question requires respondents to make the same skip, the 'Go to' instruction should not be presented twice. In the case of a yes/no question a larger arrow that joins the answer boxes may be used to point to a single instruction (see Diagram 5.34). Alternatively the instruction may be presented beneath the answers, by itself or with an arrow head at the beginning of the text (e.g. see Diagram 5.35).

Yes ☐  Go to question **15**

No ☐

Diagram 5.34

Tick one only

By 31 December 2000. ☐

By 30 June 2001. ☐

After 30 June 2001.. ☐

No intention... ☐

Please go to Question 13

Diagram 5.35

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Arrow head

A standard arrow head is used for locating instructions placed around the address box and 'No/Yes' instructions. This standardises ABS forms to a single style of arrow (see Diagram 5.36).

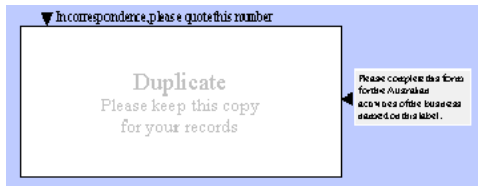


Diagram 5.36

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Wording in Address box

Wording for duplicate forms is 'Duplicate Please keep this copy for your records' which is displayed in the address box in 24 point bold for 'Duplicate', 18 point bold for 'Please keep this copy for your records'. Both text should be in 10% black shading and centred within the address box (see Diagram 5.36 above).

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Summary

The range of typeface sizes and fonts given above have been carefully selected to give you a set of clear and unambiguous rules for representing the different features of each form. If you follow these rules consistently, respondents will be able to more readily discriminate between the various kinds of information on the form.

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References

- Wheildon, Colin (1990) *Communicating or just making pretty shapes: A study of the validity- or otherwise- of some elements of typographic design* Newspaper Advertising Bureau of Australia Ltd, Sydney.

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Question Structure

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QUESTION STRUCTURE

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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- Introduction
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Introduction

The way in which questions are asked will influence how well the form works. When you design questions you should take into account;

- For most ABS business surveys many of the questions used can be drawn directly from the Standard Question Wording developed by Economic Standards and Classifications, and from other business forms. Similarly, there are standard modules for ABS household survey questionnaires which should be used where appropriate. However, when developing new questions or updating old ones the following should be taken into account.

What is a question?

Any set of words which ask the respondent to give information. An example is shown in Diagram 6.1.

1 How many people does this business employ?

	Number
Males	
Females	

In the last example 'Males' and 'Females' are subsidiary questions (also called sub-questions). In some cases a question may consist of a caption or item only. For ABS forms this style is generally restricted to financial data items as these are used on many forms, are based on accounting standards, and are well understood by respondents (see Diagram 6.2). A question consisting of a caption or item only does not use a question mark or any other punctuation such as a full stop.

Part 3 – Income items

5	Income from services (report net of discounts given)	\$		,		.00
6	Sales of goods (report net of discounts given).....	\$		,		.00

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You are trying to create a dialogue, or conversation, between the form and the respondent. The respondent must be able to easily understand and take part in this dialogue. To do this you need to know how respondents behave. Research into form-filling behaviour (see Frohlich 1986) has suggested some of the principles which guide respondents:

Principle of linear progression: work through the questions in the order they appear on the form.

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Research on Social Security forms in the UK by Frohlich (1986) found that on average, subjects failed to read over half the relevant explanations and instructions printed on the form. Subjects consistently read those explanations most necessary to understanding the questions and they paid particular attention to instructions next to tick boxes to know where to go next. They paid the least attention to instructions following answer spaces. To give instructions the best chance of being read, they need to be presented with their respective questions so that respondents see the information as relevant. If the information can be applied as soon as it is read, the respondent will remember the information and use it (see Jenkins & Dillman, 1997). In this context, instructions include mentions of the reference period as well as examples and other notes.

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Principle of question routing: *jump directly to a new question if the form tells you to.*

It is too late to give instructions or explanations after the respondent has jumped to the new question. All notes, inclusions and exclusions and other instructions should be between the question and the answer space, never below the answer space. Any sequencing should be placed in the appropriate position, after any information relevant to the respondent and before any irrelevant answer options. The combination of following skip instructions immediately and not giving all instructions full attention leads to another reason why respondents should not be explicitly directed to the next question in a form. When forms use "go to next" instructions respondents can learn to assume, incorrectly, that all "go to" instructions mean go to the next question. This reduces the effectiveness of "go to" instructions asking them to skip the following question/s (Barnett, 1991).

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Principle of question omission: *miss out questions that don't seem to apply to you.*

Remember you do not have the advantage of actual dialogue or conversation, where if you ask respondents something they don't understand, or don't think is applicable to them, they can say:

'I don't understand'

or

'That doesn't apply to me'

The respondent giving information on a self-administered form cannot tell you this and will either leave the question unanswered, give an answer to suit the question the respondent thinks you should have asked or even change the question. Sometimes it is appropriate to include a "not applicable" option in questions so that respondents are able to record that they do not think it applies to them. Form designers should avoid questions that allow respondents to correctly leave the answer space blank when they have been routed to that question, as it is then unclear whether the respondent should have recorded an answer or not. There are three other principles which cover respondent behaviour at points of confusion:

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Principle of question preview: *If in doubt about the meaning of the current question, read the next question.*

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Principle of question review: *If in doubt about your interpretation of the previous question, review that question and the answer provided.*

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Principle of topic scan: *If in doubt about the relevance of the current question topic, scan the local topic context.*

It is important, therefore, that questions are presented in a meaningful order and grouped by topic. This enhances both the comprehension and the recall of the respondent. By careful question design and testing you should prevent any confusion arising in the first place. Be aware of any context effects the surrounding questions may have.

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Layout of questions

A question starts with a question number in the left margin. The main question text is presented on the same line as the question number with the answer box to the right or below it and any instructions in between the text and the box. A question may contain sub-questions if there is a strong association between the parts or if the main question is a filter to the next main question. When a question carries on to the following page, the main question text should be repeated with "- continued" after it to help keep the respondent oriented within the form.

Labelling the sub-parts of a question should be used whenever the sub-parts are long or have their own instructions etc. so that the labelling is useful to make it clearer which bits belong together. If there are sub-sub parts they would need to be quite short and simple otherwise the whole question gets too complicated and the sub-question should be made a proper question by itself.

The labels should follow the pattern 1 (a), (b), (c), 2 (a) and so on, so that each labelled question has its own answer box, (see Diagram 6.3). Decimals to label questions and sub-questions e.g. 1, 1.1, 1.2, should not be used on ABS forms.

5 Income from venue room hire

Note

- Exhibitions conducted as part of conventions/conferences are to be reported in (a).

(a) Meetings, conferences and conventions
(b) Exhibitions
(c) Other events

Diagram 6.3

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Use of sections or parts

When a form contains groups of questions on different topics, it can aid the respondent to give these groups distinct part or section headings, such as "Income" and "Expenses". This is especially useful for surveys where the respondents do not need to complete all of the groups of questions. Sections or parts should be based on fairly broad topics and the questions within the section or part should always be more related to each other than they are to the questions in the surrounding groups.

To help the respondent navigate through the form and realise that the topic has changed, it is preferable for a new section or part to start on

Overuse of sections or parts, like any other element on the page, makes the form too visually complicated. Forms designers should always try to avoid having a section or part that contains only one question and in general the headings should not replicate question text as this increases clutter without aiding comprehension. Sections or parts should not be used instead of questions- they are headings only.

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There are two basic types of questions, open-ended and closed. These give respondents different degrees of freedom when choosing an answer. Open-ended questions allow respondents to give the answer in their own words, rather than having to select from options (for example see Diagram 6.4).

Diagram 6.4

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If you use open-ended questions you may have to give some examples or directions on how to answer, for example (see Diagram 6.5).

Diagram 6.5

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Diagram 6.6

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Diagram 6.7

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1 What was the amount spent on diesel fuel during 2005-06?

\$,000

Advantages of open-ended questions

They allow a large number of possible answers, and they collect exact values from a wide range of possible values.

Open-ended questions are often used in initial pilot testing to determine the range of possible answers and the availability of the data being sought.

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Disadvantages of open-ended questions

This type of question is more demanding than, say, tick boxes because respondents have to write out an answer.

Open-ended questions are also more demanding on office processing. You will need to create a coding frame to interpret a variety of responses, which will differ from each other in detail and accuracy, for example (see Diagram 6.9).

1 What is your occupation?

Clerk

1 What is your occupation?

Trainee sales clerk in a life insurance company

Diagram 6.9

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These responses could result in two different codes, depending on your coding frame.

A better approach is to ask for exactly what is wanted including an example of the detail required, for example (see Diagram 6.10).

34 In the main job held last week, what was the person's occupation?

Note

- Give full title.
- For example, Childcare Aide, Maths Teacher, Pastry Cook, Tanning Machine Operator, Apprentice Toolmaker, Sheep and Wheat Farmer.

Diagram 6.10

Open-ended questions can also cause problems because of poor handwriting, particularly in an OCR form as the machines can scan text but the recognition is not as accurate as for numbers.

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Closed questions

Closed questions provide respondents with definite choices. The respondent need only indicate which choice is the most appropriate, for example (see Diagram 6.11).

10 How many people does this business employ?

Tick one box

None ☐

1 to 4 ☐

5 to 10 ☐

Over 10 ☐

Diagram 6.11

At some point in the form, the respondent should be instructed how to complete closed questions, i.e. to *tick* or *cross* the box for the right option. This instruction usually goes in the "Please read this first" box and is repeated in the caption headings as in Diagram 6.12. "Tick" is used in most ABS business forms, in part because it is seen as an affirmation whereas "cross" can be seen as a negation, making the response more ambiguous. However "cross" is also accepted because respondents tend to keep their crosses more within the boundaries of the given box than their ticks. Question designs that require other methods of completion such as the circling of the appropriate option, or the crossing out of incorrect options, are not acceptable on ABS forms.

Closed questions have the following types of answers.

Yes/No answers

Respondents choose either 'Yes' or 'No', for example (see Diagram 6.12).

3 Is this a not for profit organisation?

No ☐

Yes ☐

Diagram 6.12

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Limited choice answers

A number of choices are offered, only one of which should be chosen, for example (see Diagram 6.13).

7 What main method of heating is used in this house?

Tick one box

None ☐

Electricity ☐

Gas ☐

Other ☐

Diagram 6.13

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Multiple choice answers

More than one answer can be chosen, for example (see Diagram 6.14).

5 What forms of heating are used in this house?

Tick all that apply

None ☐

Electricity ☐

Gas ☐

Other ☐

Diagram 6.14

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You must provide all possible alternatives in a closed question, including choices to cater for a non-response, zero, or not applicable answer. No alternatives should be left out or implied. The alternatives should be self-explanatory and mutually exclusive (see Diagrams 6.15 and 6.16).

Bad:

1 How long has this business been operating?

Tick one only

1 to 5 years ☐

5 to 10 years ☐

Over 10 years ☐

Diagram 6.15

Good:

1 How long has this business been operating?

Tick one only

Under 1 year ☐

1 year and under 5 years ☐

5 years and under 10 years ☐

10 years or more ☐

Diagram 6.16

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You should take care to provide answer categories that reflect the respondents' characteristics or experience, for example the following question (see Diagram 6.17) would be difficult to answer unless records of the quantity of fuel bought are kept by the respondent.

1 How many litres of diesel fuel did this business use in the last year?

Tick one only

Less than 100 litres ... ☐

100 to 500 litres ... ☐

Over 500 litres ... ☐

Diagram 6.17

As far as possible, answers should encompass the full range of variation across the survey sample or population, while keeping the list of options to a manageable length.

Use words and terms in the answer choices that the respondent is familiar with. You must be sure through testing that respondents understand the words.

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Bias

Answer choices can be of two types: **ordered** (see Diagram 6.18) or **unordered** (see Diagram 6.19).

6 What is the period of service requirement for persons to join this fund?

Tick one only

None ... ☐

Less than 1 year ... ☐

1 year ... ☐

Over 1 year ... ☐

Diagram 6.18

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Whenever there is an inherent order in the list of options, this should be used. For example, a forms designer should never present a list like that in the above example with the "1 year" option after the "Over 1 year" option.

2 Who carries out the day to day administration of the fund, that is, record keeping?

Tick one only

Trustee or internal fund manager ... ☐

Life insurance officer ... ☐

Superannuation consultant ... ☐

Other ... ☐

Diagram 6.19

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Unordered answers are those where there is no graduation of answers. When using unordered answers you should try to control bias in the pattern of answers (see Schwarz, Hippler & Noelle-Neumann, 1992). Possible solutions are to list the most common alternative first (which also reduces the reading that respondents have to do), or to list choices randomly.

The longer the list of options, the more pronounced the effects of order become. To avoid respondents choosing from only the first few options of a long list so they don't have to read the others, options should be categorised into groups or sub-questions. Unordered lists should be no longer than about ten items long, fewer if each item is longer than two or three words. Forms designers should also phrase the alternatives similarly. The alternatives should be of similar length and be similar in other respects.

Forms designers should also be aware that presented with a list of options, the respondent may interpret the options as having an order that was not intended. This perceived order could lead the respondent to misinterpret the question or give inconsistent answers.

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Rating scales

Questions that ask respondents to rate things, the favourability of an item, the frequency of a behaviour, and so on, are a type of ordered closed question. Traditionally an integral part of household surveys, rating scales are increasingly being used in ABS business surveys due to a shift away from purely accounting-type questions towards more motivational and behavioural items.

Rating questions should be presented in a similar format to other closed questions, using a list of options with tick boxes (see Diagram 6.20). The different options should have verbal labels, not numbers, because the labels help the respondent understand the question and reinforce that a rating scale is an ordinal measure not an interval or ratio one. The list should be presented vertically down the page the same way as other closed question options unless the scale is being used as a heading in a matrix.

28 Please indicate how the ability to receive orders for goods or services via the Internet or web has affected quality of customer service:

Decreased		☐
No change		☐
Increased		☐

Diagram 6.20

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One of the most important considerations when designing rating scales is that the categories are balanced. This means that there should be an equal number of positive and negative options to choose from. Using more options for one side (usually positive) biases the responses towards that side for several reasons. These include: social desirability, where the lack of sufficient negative options leads the respondent to believe a negative response is discouraged (see e.g. Tourangeou & Smith, 1996); using the categories as information so that the respondent might incorrectly assume the range represents the true distribution of the population (see e.g. Schwarz & Hippler 1991) and so agree with the majority; and central tendency where the respondent picks the middle category regardless of the label.

For similar reasons, it is generally preferable that rating scales include a neutral option such as "Neither satisfactory or unsatisfactory", or "Don't know" in the middle of the scale or "Not applicable" at either end. These are important because again, respondents should have a formal way to indicate when (they think) a question does not apply to them. If forced, respondents will produce an opinion on the spot that is neither accurate nor stable (see e.g. Flynn, 1996). The appropriate neutral option can be difficult to determine and form designers in doubt should see DCM for advice.

So that the question itself does not bias the respondent, it is important to word the rating question in a balanced way, e.g. "Do you favour or oppose...." to imply that responses in either direction are acceptable (see Schuman & Presser, 1981). It is also generally better if negative options are presented first in the list, especially for sensitive questions. As part of balancing the options it is important to test whether the wording chosen for negative and positive options, e.g. "Difficult" and "Easy" are actually considered to be opposites by respondents. The negative and positive options should also be equivalent in intensity, e.g. "Very difficult" versus "Very easy" rather than "Extremely difficult" versus "Fairly easy".

In general, three or five categories are the appropriate number of options for rating scales on ABS forms. For five categories, these would consist of one low and one high intensity option for each direction and one neutral. If required seven categories may be used but any more than that generally makes too fine a distinction between ratings that are of necessity vague.

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Ranking questions

Ranking questions are those which ask the respondent to number the different options in a question in order of importance (see Diagram 6.21).

1 Please rank in order of importance the following benefits of ordering goods and services via the Internet.

Lower product costs		☐
Lower transaction costs		☐
Time saving		☐
Access to a wider range of suppliers		☐
Ability to track orders		☐

Diagram 6.21

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In general ranking questions should be avoided for two reasons:

1. they are quite complicated to explain and respondents often have difficulty completing them correctly. Note that the question in Diagram 6.21 does not include an instruction like "1 equals highest importance". Leaving it up to the respondent to guess would be risky, but instructing them would make the question longer and clumsy;
2. the output from ranking questions is quite difficult to deal with unless you are looking for a "winner" alone as in voting procedures. In particular, the problem is with ranking only some of the items. When a respondent ranks every item it is easy to assign a value to each item that can be collated in some way, but when a respondent only ranks some it is very difficult to decide how to value the items left blank. The interpretation of those items is unclear- are they equally unimportant, are they not applicable, and are they equivalent to those ranked last by other respondents or not? What do you do when the respondent ticks several boxes instead?

The recommended way of measuring this sort of item is ask respondents to rate each item individually, using a verbal scale rather than numeric similar to other rating questions. This would allow the respondents to imply a ranking order where there was one, rate items the same where there was no difference, and indicate where items were not applicable. The respondent would rate the importance of each item by ticking a box under the scale of e.g. "Very important, Important, Somewhat important, Not at all important, Not applicable". This would be presented in a simple matrix with items down the left side and the scale along the top so the respondent could refer to the scale easily but without it being repeated for each item (see for example, Diagram 6.22)

What were your reasons for making these changes and how important were they?

Tick one box per line only

	Not a reason	Low importance	Medium importance	High importance
Increased productivity...	☐	☐	☐	☐
Increased land value	☐	☐	☐	☐

Diagram 6.22

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Advantages of closed questions

Closed questions are cheaper and easier to process and easier to respond to (assuming that all of the answer choices are applicable to the respondents).

Closed questions are an advantage when:

- You can anticipate all (or most) of the responses.
- An exact value is not needed.

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Disadvantages of closed questions

You will need to put more effort into developing closed questions than into open-ended questions. The respondent is not given the opportunity to compensate for a poorly framed closed question.

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Partially closed questions

If you find that it is difficult or impractical to present all possible choices, the list of alternatives should end with: 'Other (please specify)' followed by an appropriately sized answer box for respondents to specify the nature of their "other".

This is then called a partially closed question which is a compromise between open and closed questions. Choices are provided but respondents have the option of creating their own choice, for example (see Diagram 6.23). Use this question type where most responses can be anticipated but the remainder cannot.

Nurseries, cut flowers or cultivated turf	☐	☐	☐	☐
Grapevines	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other crops (please specify)				
	☐	☐	☐	☐

Diagram 6.23

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Choosing between question types

Your choice between open-ended, closed and partially closed questions will depend on:

- What the user needs.
- The level of accuracy needed.
- What information is potentially available from the respondent.
- The position of the questions in the form.
- The experience of respondents (that is, is this a one-off or a continuing request?).
- The sensitivity of the question.

A closed question generally desensitises a question. For example, asking for personal income by using income groups is likely to be less sensitive than asking for a dollar value.

You will have to test any question to find out whether you have made the correct choice.

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Use of classifications

Formal classification systems (such as Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classifications (ANZSIC)) are an attempt to describe in structured categories something which is almost infinitely varied.

You will come across two main problems in adopting formal classification systems:

- Ensuring a consistent understanding of the classification categories, in particular the residual categories of the classification (i.e. 'other' categories), as classification systems may not identify the full range of things these categories include.
- Adapting the formal classification if it does not correspond to the informal classification systems used by respondents.

When you develop questions you will sometimes have to make compromises with the formal classification used by the ABS in order to get useful answers from respondents. This should always involve consultation with the appropriate standards area.

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The classification has to be understood by the respondent before it can work. Therefore, all classifications you intend to use on the form should be thoroughly tested with potential respondents to find out:

- How well the categories are understood by respondents.
- How well they apply to the respondent.

For example, to collect occupational data from a population of health employees, consult with Population Statistics standards section on the most suitable Australian Standard Classification of Occupation (ASCO) categories to use as a basis for the response categories of the question.

Where you know, following testing, that respondents are going to experience difficulties in using the classification, investigate alternatives in the following order:

- Maintain the conceptual basis of the classification categories but change the examples of the categories to suit the population of the survey.
- Use specifically designed response categories and map these to the output classification after the data has been collected, as in the occupation example above.
- Include a partially closed question in the classification to give the respondents the opportunity to create different responses, for example (see Diagram 6.24).
- Use open-ended questions only and interpret the responses according to the formal classification system (see Diagram 6.11).

Construction	☐
Wholesale Trade	☐
Retail Trade	☐
Other (Please specify)	☐

Diagram 6.24

All of these alternatives should be tested before deciding on the best method for your particular collection.

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Sequence of questions

The questions on a form should follow a sequence that is logical to the respondents.

You should design the sequence of questions to:

- Initially provide and later maintain respondents' motivation to complete the form. Beginning with simple questions is a good way to achieve this.
- Aid respondents' recall.
- Direct respondents to the information source or sources they should use.
- Be relevant to respondents' own records.
- Appear sensible to respondents.

Group questions into areas of related topics and ask all questions relating to that topic before going on to the next one, for example: If users want to measure the income generated by a business in a particular industry they need data by specific relevant categories, as shown in the next example (see Diagram 6.25).

1 Income	
Sales	\$,000
Rent and leasing income	\$,000
Interest	\$,000
Other income	\$,000
Total income	\$,000

Diagram 6.25

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If the data are to be collected from accountants, useful groupings would be to follow the headings of Income and Expenditure, Statement of Financial Performance or Statement of Financial Position (see Diagrams 6.26 and 6.27).

Diagram 6.26

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Diagram 6.27

However, such a grouping may only seem logical to an accountant. Choose a logic or grouping that reflects the understanding of particular respondents.

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You should give thought to the location of questions that may be sensitive to the respondent. Generally, sensitive questions should not be placed at the beginning of the form. Place them in a section of the form where they are most meaningful in the context of other questions.

In the following example (see Diagram 6.28) which shows an Income question from an unincorporated business, the item 'owner's drawings' might be sensitive. Putting it in the context of this question may have the effect of making it less sensitive.

Diagram 6.28

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When a sensitive question has several options for the respondent to select from, the less desirable options should be presented first in the list. This indicates to respondents that it is acceptable for them to choose those options (see Diagram 6.29). Similarly, yes/no questions without sequencing should generally present the "no" option first because it is seen as socially desirable to the respondent to answer yes to any neutral question (called acquiescence).

Diagram 6.29

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Filter questions

Some questions, usually referred to as filter questions, ask respondents to make a choice, where one of the choices leads them to the next question, while the other choice leads them to a different question or place on the form. A filter question is used to exclude respondents from subsequent questions if they do not apply, for example (see Diagram 6.30). Filter questions help the respondent to understand the sequence of questions.

2 Did this business make any donations to organisations or individuals during the period covered by this form?

No ☒ Go to Question 6

Yes ☐

3 What types of donations did this business make?

Diagram 6.30

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It is important that filter questions are used carefully. Respondents should not be made choose between options without enough information- an instruction box with definitions or inclusions will often be necessary. Sometimes respondents cannot make an informed judgement without seeing the contents of the following questions, including in some cases the available response options. Sometimes respondents may not remember pertinent activities until they read further. In these cases a "none of the above" at the end is more appropriate (see Diagram 6.31). Sensitive topics should not use filter questions because they discourage reporting.

9 Did this business experience any of the following IT security incidents or breaches during the 12 months to 30 June 2002?

Tick all that apply

Virus ☐

Trojan or worm ☐

Unauthorised network access ☐

Attack resulting in denial of service.. ☐

Other (Please specify).. ☐

None identified. ☒ Go to question 13

Diagram 6.31

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In general, place the sequenced response first in filter questions because that response takes the respondent to a subsequent question and then they do not have to read the other option. The order of the 'No'/'Yes' answers should be consistent throughout the form.

Filter questions are preferable to conditional questions (see Diagram 6.32). With a conditional question it is unclear whether a blank answer is:

- A non-response, or
- An appropriate implication by the respondent.

1 If this business has a parent company, what is its name?

Diagram 6.32

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Make questions simple

A complicated or double-barrelled question is a potential source of non-response and increases the likelihood of errors, for example (see Diagram 6.33).

1 Does this business use the services of an accountant or a tax advisor or other financial advisor?

No ☐

Yes ☐

Diagram 6.33

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This question can be made simpler as follows (see Diagram 6.34).

1 Does this business use the services of a financial advisor, such as an accountant or a tax advisor?

No ☐

Yes ☐

Diagram 6.34

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This places the broadest or most common category first and uses the specialised or less common categories as examples. An indicator of a complex question is the use of conjunctions 'and', and 'or'.

Qualifiers included in the body of a question or questions with a lot of information carrying words may cause problems. Qualifiers may impose or add an unfamiliar concept to what was a familiar one. Too many information carrying words may interfere with the respondents' grasp of the main element of a question, for example (see Diagram 6.35).

1 Have you vacated any land including change in tenancies?

No ☐

Yes ☐

Diagram 6.35

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This question could be improved as follows (see Diagram 6.36).

1 Have you vacated any land?

Including

- Change in tenancies

No ☐

Yes ☐

Diagram 6.36

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Short qualifiers can be presented at the end of a question in brackets and plain type, see Diagram 6.37

6 Sales of goods (report net of discounts given)

Diagram 6.37

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Often two questions are far better than one complex question. For example Diagram 6.38 below shows a much simpler set of questions compared to the complex single question , in Diagram 6.39.

1 Has the business acquired any land for agricultural purposes since 30 June 2006?

Including
• Land newly purchased, rented, leased etc.

No ☐

Yes ☐ Area acquired

Date acquired

/ /

2 Has the business vacated any land that was used for agricultural purposes since 30 June 2006?

Including
• Land newly purchased, rented, leased etc.

No ☐

Yes ☐ Area vacated

Date vacated

/ /

Diagram 6.38

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1 Has the business operating the holding acquired (by purchase, rent, lease, etc.) or vacated (by sale, transfer for surrender of lease etc.) any land for agricultural purposes since 31 March 2000?

Please give details below.

Date acquired or vacated / /

Area acquired or vacated

Diagram 6.39

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Memory bias

You should be aware of bias due to respondents' poor memory. This has varying effects but common ones are:

- Remembering what should have been done rather than what was done.
- Moving into the reference period activity that occurred prior to the period or has occurred since (called telescoping), for example (see Diagram 6.40).

1 Did you buy a car in the last year?

No ☐

Yes ☐

Diagram 6.40

The answer to this question will be boosted by those who bought a car in the last year to year and a quarter or more.

Try to ask questions that relate to some form of record keeping to enhance accurate reporting (see Diagram 6.41).

1 Did you buy a car in 1996?

or

1 Did you buy a car in the period 1 January to 31 December 1996?

No ☐

Yes ☐

Diagram 6.41

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Remember

How the question is presented (open, closed, partially closed) and the layout used are as important as the words used to ask it. You must always test questions with actual respondents to find out whether the questions can be understood and answered accurately.

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Language

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LANGUAGE

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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Introduction

When discussing issues in the development of questionnaires, Richard Platek, Director of Statistics Canada, underlined a basic truth in form design:

'The subjects of measurement are human beings and the process of measurement is based on language.'

If, through inappropriate language, the respondent cannot fully understand what we are asking, he or she cannot provide what we want. In short, because we are dealing with people and the meaning of words, the potential for misunderstanding is enormous.

All this translates into a 'we have to make them understand' view of respondents. That view has two components: the 'them' and the 'understand'. This section addresses the language that connects these two.

First, the 'them': who are these people who complete ABS forms? They are Australians of all social strata and ability levels. They are not blessed with some special insight into statistical language just because we sent them a form. While the ability of respondents to understand questions and explanations varies, it is all too easy to overestimate this level of ability.

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David Sless, Director of the Communication Research Institute of Australia, suggests that forms designers should work with the following minimal expectations of respondents:

- a. They have a limited vocabulary. They can understand short sentences with simple punctuation, but are likely to be confused by long and elaborate explanations.
- b. They can understand positive instructions more easily than negative ones.
- c. They know nothing about ABS procedures or structure.
- d. They might not understand why the information asked for is needed. If they cannot understand what a form is for, they are less likely to fill it in promptly and accurately. The same applies to individual questions.

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There is a myth in the ABS that respondents understand our definitions and jargon, and that our explanations are well understood. The evidence suggests that is not generally the case.

For example, ask a small business respondent what the difference is between establishments and type of activity units? Chances are the respondent will have some difficulty in understanding these words, which are part of the ABS language, but not part of the respondent's.

Words with precise definitions are an integral part of ABS forms. However, unless evidence from tests and evaluations shows that respondents understand the meaning, we must make the meaning clear in appropriate language. We cannot presume every respondent speaks our language. Obviously not every respondent will understand the meaning of 'bailment', or 'leverage lease agreement' for example. Use appropriate language to explain the meaning, or find a form of words which is clear to your respondents.

Don't be concerned about 'talking down' or insulting the intelligence of respondents through simple language. Nobody is insulted by something they can understand easily.

If, through testing, you know your group of respondents understands 'bailment' then you can include the word in the form with confidence.

In essence, the way to make 'them' understand is to talk to 'them' in the language they understand. ABS officers often find themselves explaining forms to respondents on the telephone in conversational appropriate language. Used in this form, appropriate language short circuits the need for additional explanations. The principles of appropriate language are detailed in the following paragraphs.

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Form title

Briefly, the title of the form should:

- consist of as few words as possible;
- reflect the content of the form; and
- be as bold as possible.

This is particularly the case where forms are sent to people or organisations who receive a large number of forms, and yours has to be readily identifiable amongst these others. It is also a matter of courtesy to let the respondent know straight away what is being asked.

A form title ideally consists of only two parts: a subject (2004-05 Economic Activity) and a function (survey), e.g. Economic Activity Survey 2004-05.

The title is not a sentence, and should be brief and meaningful.

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Section headings

Evidence suggests that a section heading often prompts a respondent to skip over a section if it appears to not apply to their situation. e.g. the 'Drivers under 25' section on NRMA car insurance proposals applies to all applicants but this section was often ignored by those over 25 years of age. The amount of follow up required was dramatically reduced when the section heading was removed.

Section headings can be useful where a respondent is directed to skip over sections of a form. In this situation section headings can help in the quick identification of the relevant sections of a form.

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Instructions

There are two main types of instructions used on forms. The first type deals with what to do with the form, where to get help and so on. The second type deals with how to answer questions.

Instructions are frequently ignored on forms. Instructions placed at the start of forms, if read at all, are often forgotten by the time the person has answered one or two questions.

Short-term memory is used extensively when completing forms. This means that instructions need to be placed as closely as possible to the place where they are to be applied. This often means repeating the same instruction each time it is to be acted upon. This is particularly the case with instructions on how to answer questions.

As mentioned earlier, the task of completing a form is not regarded as a reading activity. On receiving a form the first thing a respondent is likely to do is grab a pen and write something in the first available space. Instructions might only be referred to by them if they get stuck.

Instructions as to what to do with the form are best grouped together, either at the very start or the very end of the form. The ABS has adopted a standard of putting these all on the first two pages. The front page also contains information about why the information is being sought, the authority for the collection of the data, and names and phone numbers of where to get help.

Instructions at the end of a form often include a checklist of items from the form and details of what to do next.

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Short sentences

Short sentences are easier to understand than long ones. Although it is unrealistic to specify a maximum length, each sentence should convey a single item of information.

A poor sentence combining many items of information is shown in the following example (see Diagram 7.1).

For stocks other than those described in Instructions 9, 10, 11 and 12 below, report all stocks owned by the business named on page 1, whether held at locations of the business (including stocks held at storage units, project sites) or elsewhere (for example, goods in bonded stores or public warehouses, on consignment, in transit or being manufactured, processed or assembled on commission for this enterprise from materials owned by this business).

Diagram 7.1

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Breaking the instruction into sentences containing one idea each and improving the layout gives the following presentation (see Diagram 7.2).

3 Report all stocks owned by the business named on page 1

Including

- All stocks held at all locations including storage units and project sites
- Goods in bonded warehouses on consignment or in transit
- Goods being manufactured or assembled on commission for this enterprise from materials owned by this business

Diagram 7.2

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Order of clauses

Sentences should have clauses in chronological order to aid comprehension. In the example below (see Diagram 7.3), the first action is to read the instructions, but this doesn't become clear until the end of the sentence.

Before you fill in the form, read the instructions

Diagram 7.3

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A better method is shown below (see Diagram 7.4).

Read the instructions then fill in the form

Diagram 7.4

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Respondent / activity relationship

Keep clauses naming the respondent close to the clause which says what the respondent has to do. The example below (see Diagram 7.5) inserts an explanatory phrase before the action is complete.

The respondent should submit in the enclosed reply paid envelope, to the Australian Bureau of Statistics by August 31, this completed form.

Diagram 7.5

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The following example (see Diagram 7.6) is a clearer way of giving the same instruction.

Please complete this form and return it in the reply paid envelope to the Australian Bureau of Statistics by **31 August 2006**.

Diagram 7.6

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Positive versus negative questions

Research has shown that when people are asked negative questions they are much slower in responding. The slower response is caused by people having to think about the answers rather than giving them automatically. Although we might consider that causing people to think about questions is good, with many questions people think wrongly and give the wrong answers. Negative questions cause additional effort for our respondents, for no good reason.

The following is an example of negative instruction (see Diagram 7.7).

1 Are you

Note

- Cross out whatever does not apply

Single ☐

Married ☐

Diagram 7.7

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The positive alternative is shown below (see Diagram 7.8) where the instruction 'tick one only' is positive and unambiguous.

1 Marital status

Tick one only

Single ☐

Married ☐

Diagram 7.8

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Active versus passive voice

Most people find sentences in the active voice easier to understand than the passive voice.

Passive voice is when the subject is acted upon, for example: "This form is to be *completed* by the operator whether operating for the full year or only part of the year."

Active voice is when the subject performs the action: "The operator is to complete the form, whether operating for the full year or only part of the year."

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Making nouns out of verbs

This is a common practice with many writers. In the following example the verb 'certify' is made into a noun: "Certification for all collection forms must be given by an Assistant Statistician or Deputy Australian Statistician."

The preferred alternative is much clearer, uses fewer words and is more direct: "An Assistant Statistician or Deputy Australian Statistician must certify all collection forms."

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Conversational style

Form designers frequently try to save space on a form by omitting phrases that they consider to be unnecessary but which would have helped clarify the meaning.

The following example shows a sentence which has been abbreviated by leaving out some of the words which would be used in spoken English: "Comment here on unusual circumstances (drought, floods, fires, hailstorms etc.)."

The conversational style of the next example is more easily understood by people with an average reading ability:

Please provide comments:

- on any of the information you have supplied on this form
- on any questions which caused problems

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Words

Words of more than two syllables should be avoided as much as possible, although length alone should not be the criterion for evaluating their use. Some short words such as redress are not familiar to most people, while other multi-syllable words may be very well known. This does not mean that long words should never be used. However, they are frequently misunderstood by poor readers and this should be taken into consideration in the design. Only an evaluation of the readability of the form e.g. using observational studies or interviews with respondents, will provide the answer.

Context

The use of words in a particular context may change the meaning. A word when used alone may be quite familiar to people, but when used in a specialised context it may not be familiar. In many cases the reader will have a clearer concept of what is to be filled in if the reasons for wanting the information are known. ABS forms may carry a brief description on the use of the statistics collected. Apart from any legal obligations, respondents may require an indication of why they are required to complete the form, and what ABS will do with the information collected.

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Technical terms

Technical and statistical terms are to be avoided unless you have evidence that respondents understand what they mean. If you do not have this evidence, explain the term in appropriate language. Again, the question here is, do the respondents understand what is meant by technical terms and industry-specific definitions? For example 'leased assets', according to an ABS definition, refers to 'fixed tangible assets leased/hired under a finance lease or leverage lease agreement which effectively transfers from the lessor to the lessee substantially all the risks and benefits incident to ownership'. In short, if technical terms are used, explain them and test them to be sure.

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Punctuation

Punctuation aids comprehension if used correctly. Only commas, full stops and question marks are readily understood by most people. The burning need for a semicolon or a long succession of commas probably means a new sentence is needed. Further information is provided in the Australian Government Style Manual.

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Summary

Just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, words are what the reader makes them. The meaning ABS attaches to the words may not be the meaning the respondent attaches to them. The only way to find out is to test the words on the respondents. The principles of appropriate language are a solid foundation on which to base our approach to the language used in forms. The principles are not a substitute for testing particular words with particular groups of respondents.

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Construction and Colour

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CONSTRUCTION AND COLOUR

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

Contents

- Introduction
- Number of pages
- Shading and contrast
- Background colours
 - Acceptable background colours for OCR forms
 - Additional background colours for non-OCR forms
- Coloured vs black and white forms
- Distinguishing between forms
- References

Introduction

Most of the information form designers need to know about physically constructing forms should be obtained from the Collection Management Unit and the Despatch and Collection Unit in the Integrated Collection Branch (ICB). The construction related information that concerns Data Collection Methodology is that which may affect the respondent's comprehension of the form and their attitudes towards the form and the ABS in general.

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Number of pages

Use as many pages as you need to achieve a clear layout. The costs of repairing errors due to poor layout are always more than the printing costs for an extra page. A longer form with a good layout will also obtain equivalent or better response rates compared to a shorter, cramped form. For example, one study by Champion and Sear (1969) used the same content on three forms, of 3, 6 and 9 pages. The 9 page form, with the most spread out format, got the statistically significant highest response rate. The length issue is quite complex, and requires consideration of number and range of data items, perceived versus actual effort to complete, question order as well as layout and so on.

When using a standard booklet made from a folded A3 sheet, pages can only be added or deleted in multiples of 4. Blank pages must be added at the end of forms that do not add up to the right number of pages. Any empty pages remaining after the questions finish should still be coloured with the appropriate shading. Blank pages also need to have page numbers to aid the printers, and these are placed on the top and bottom of the page.

Shading and contrast

This standard uses the Pantone® Matching System (PMS), which is a common method of specifying colours to printers. This is shown by the letters 'PMS' followed by a three or four digit number (for example, PMS 405, PMS 2735).

The general background of a form is shaded in 20% of the background colour. Notes boxes, Including/excluding boxes and similar are shaded in 10% background colour. Only the spaces where respondents put their answers and contact details should be left white. Text, eyeguides, answer boxes and other form elements, are printed either in solid colour or black.

The black ink which should be used is PMS 405U, which is actually a dark charcoal rather than true black. All of the main text on ABS forms should be this black. This is required because when forms are scanned, the colours drop-out of the image. The text needs to remain visible in the image to identify which question the respondent's answer refers to etc. The black also assists with the system recognition of each page.

All other black elements on the form, such as patch codes, registration marks and Form IDs, should be done in PMS 405U as well so that overall only two colours are used to print the form.

Small amounts of text close to answer boxes, such as dollar signs, may be done in solid (100%) background colour. For OCR forms anything within 3mm of each answer box should be in colour so recognition of the respondent's writing is not affected. The background colours specified below have been chosen in part to ensure a good contrast between text (black or solid) and background to maintain good legibility.

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Background colours

The following colours have also been chosen because they are produced by a simple mix of one or two basic ink colours. This will make quality control more reliable.

Acceptable background colours for OCR forms

- Orange (PMS 123)
- Yellowish Orange (PMS 142)
- Orange (PMS 137)
- Orange Brown (PMS 150)
- Brownish Orange (PMS 157)
- Peach/Orange (PMS 1565)
- Reddish Brown (PMS 158)
- Reddish Pink (PMS 197)
- Reddish Pink (PMS 486)
- Pink (PMS 700)
- Pink (PMS 177)
- Purple (PMS 252)
- Purple (PMS 246)

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Additional background colours for non-OCR forms

- none
- Blue (PMS 286)
- Green (PMS 333)
- Green (PMS 347)
- Green (PMS 352)
- Pink (PMS 700)
- Pink (PMS 177)
- Purple (PMS 252)
- Purple (PMS 253)
- Purple (PMS 246)
- Aqua (PMS 320)
- Mauve (PMS 2735)

Note that the pdf of the survey form should be sent to the printers in the appropriate colour as above. The previous procedure of always sending the pdf in cyan has been discontinued due to a change in printing services supplier.

If a survey area has several form types, especially if some go into the field at the same time, then for ease of processing they should be distinctly different colours.

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Coloured vs black and white forms

Printing in colour is preferred because this allows greater design flexibility in terms of distinguishing note boxes from answer boxes and so on. A coloured form also looks more professional and attractive, and may assist the respondent in finding their form amongst other paper work. Printing in colour is therefore usually recommended even when OCR is not being used.

Some surveys may have only small print runs for particular form types and printing in colour can be more expensive than printing black and white forms. However, the manual data entry required for black and white forms (as well as coloured forms which are not set up to be OCRd) can be more expensive than scanning OCR forms. For these reasons and those mentioned in the above paragraph, the cut-off for black and white is 200 forms. Once this number of forms are required for one form type they should be printed in colour.

Black and white forms have different standards for some formatting compared to coloured forms, and should not contain any shading. See the section on Lines and Boxes and Typography for more details. Forms adapted to be "fax friendly" should be similar to a black and white standard form.

Note that the phrase "black and white forms" refers to the final product that the respondent receives. A form designed to the standards for black and white forms should not be printed onto coloured paper. This creates an unprofessional appearance and does not allow for the requirement that answer boxes always be white. Coloured forms should always be created by printing coloured ink onto white paper.

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Distinguishing between forms

It should be noted that there are techniques other than colour for distinguishing between different forms during processing, using a variety of graphical designs. Acceptable methods include the following:

- incorporating a solid bar printed along the spine of the form,
- a solid triangle printed at the bottom left corner of the front page and wrapping around to the bottom right corner of the back page.

Either of these features would be visible in a stack of forms, as well as being obvious from the front or the back of a single form. The graphic element should be printed in the same ink colour as the background or the text to avoid any increase in printing costs for the form.

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References

- Champion, D.J. & Sear, A.M. (1969), "Questionnaire response rate: A methodological analysis" *Social Forces*, Vol. 47, 335-339.

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Optical Character Recognition (OCR) Forms

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OPTICAL CHARACTER RECOGNITION (OCR) FORMS

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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Section 1: Introduction

This section of the manual is intended to serve several groups of users by:

- outlining the changes to consider and plan for when converting a form to scanning for the first time;
- providing updates for form designers with existing scanned forms; and
- acting as a reference for anyone with a specific query.

These standards for OCR forms should be fully implemented for any new or significantly changed scanned forms as they come up. They consolidate several features that have already been implemented on an *ad hoc* basis.

Areas designing OCR forms should consult with Data Collection Methodology (DCM), the Collection Management Unit (CMU) and the Despatch and Collection Unit (DCU) as early as possible in their design planning process.

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Changes in this update

The main changes in this update relate to:

- Bottom registration marks no longer required to be set closer than top registration marks (See Section 4: Registration Marks);
- Segmented text boxes for contact name on the front of form (See Section 2: Contact Details);
- Removal of purples (PMS 252 and PMS 246) from the list of acceptable background colours for OCR forms (See Section 3: Background Colour);
- Reduction of the number of 'Please provide comments' boxes from three to two (See Section 7: General Comments);
- Removal of the following standards from the OCR chapter:
 - address box standards
 - form ID on every page

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These standards apply to all forms (OCR and non-OCR) and now appear in the general form design standards Front of Form and Layout :

- 8mm x 4mm option for 'yes/no' check boxes has been removed (from both the OCR standards and Lines and Boxes standards). All check boxes are to be 5mm square.
- Minimum space from the bottom of the page number at the top of the page, to the top of text in the first line of text is 5mm (Section 4: Page number);
- The scanning system (IFP) implies a number of form design or layout requirements in addition to those specified for paper forms. In particular:
 - precision is necessary in the placing of some design elements;
 - certain colours that are acceptable for non-OCR forms are not suitable for OCR forms;
 - some question layouts which fit on non-scanned forms will not fit when converted to scanning; and
 - most form design features have been standardised to improve alignment and recognition.

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Converting 'conventional' forms to OCR forms

Converting a form to OCR format can take longer than may, at first, be estimated. The InDesign work required to change instruction and data box formats, adjust spacing around data entry boxes, and accommodate the requirements of bar-coding and drop-out colours all take time and often result in page and question spacing having to be modified.

In general, OCR forms require somewhat more space on a page than non-OCR forms. This means that forms can appear to be longer, and may require more pages to accommodate the same number of data entry fields. OCR also requires colour printing (not black and white) to allow some form details to drop out (be invisible to OCR). Black is the standard text colour for OCR and non-OCR forms.

These factors may moderately increase printing and postage costs, but generally, any increases will be more than offset by savings in other aspects of processing.

In addition, system changes may be required to support modified mark-in, load or edit changes. It is important to involve the DCU early in the process. The DCU test the form for scanning and paint the recognition screens, and sufficient time must be allowed for these processes. The DCU requires six weeks, after receipt of metadata and printed forms, in order to create and test the IFP definitions.

Three months (elapsed) is a reasonable amount of time to allow for converting forms.

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Density of forms

Forms which are sparse, in terms of the number of data items to be captured per page, will be less cost-effective for survey areas because OCR data capture through scanning is currently cost recovered on a per page basis. However, the temptation to make 'savings' by reducing the number of pages captured must be carefully assessed against the generally negative impact on data quality that arises from crowding questions on forms. Forms that are overcrowded with questions can lead to increased respondent burden and scanning errors, both which

may impact negatively on the quality of the data. Placing instructions on pages separate from data capture fields to reduce OCR costs is not an acceptable practice.

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'Label' and contact details changes and the Sample and Frame Maintenance Procedures (SFMP)

Current OCR technology does not allow for the capture of free text handwriting unless in segmented text boxes, especially any that may be written on or near the address/contact ('label') information on the front of the form. This presents a problem for following the SFMP in cases where there are changes other than in 'return to sender' situations (see Section 7: Text handling and capture).

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Master pages used for OCR forms design in InDesign

The master pages 'OCR/Full page' and 'OCR/Split page' have been created for OCR forms. The grids displayed on both master pages are in exactly the same position as the master pages used for conventional forms except for the registration marks.

The registration marks have been created and positioned at the corners of the page. They are vital items on the page, as they act as reference points for OCR read areas, and **must** be printed in solid black ink (PMS 405U). See Section 4 for more on registration marks.

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Summary of introduction

OCR is the primary mode of data capture for self-completed paper forms. There are a number of issues which will impact on the design and development of individual forms.

Areas designing OCR forms should consult with DCM, CMU and the DCU as early as possible in their design planning process.

As well as catering to the technical requirements of the OCR scanning equipment, it is very important that (as with non-OCR forms) design standards are applied consistently throughout the form, primarily to make the form as easy as possible for the provider to complete and to maximise the quality of reported data.

The standard methods for developing and evaluating forms, such as observational studies and error analysis (described in the Forms Development and Evaluation Manual), should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of OCR forms.

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Section 2: OCR front of form

The main content of this section relates to the use of bar codes and patch codes. Other front of form standards are as for non-OCR paper forms, including address box and mandatory wording.

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Standard patch code

The patch code is positioned on the front of OCR forms and non-OCR forms which are also imaged. Its purpose is to indicate to the scanner the start of a new form. Patch code position must be consistent across all forms which are required to be scanned together in a batch. Horizontal and vertical alignment of the patch code is critical for proper operation. If the patch code is placed improperly on the document, the patch sensors may fail to sense the patch and the start of the next form. Patch codes are to be printed in solid black ink [PMS 405U].

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Patch code placement

Patches must appear with the bars parallel to the leading edge of the document. There must be at least 5mm of space between the patch code and any other printed information. For an example of patch code placement see the Front of Form standards.

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Barcodes

All forms despatched from the DCU are barcoded, before the form is despatched, to facilitate mark-in and unit identification on receipt/scanning. The IFP barcode is based on the reference period (6 characters), form identifier and the unit identifier.

A significant horizontal space on the front of the form is required to contain the barcode. The barcode will always be printed horizontally across the page, usually below the address box. The size of the barcode is determined by the number of digits used in the survey identifier. As a general guide the barcode will require a blank area of dimensions: minimum 12.5 cm wide x 2 cm.

For booklets the barcode must be on the front page and cannot be at the very top or bottom of the front page because the printer does not have sufficient tension to successfully print a barcode in either extremity of the form.

During scanning, the barcode, as well as other information printed on the form, tends to show through to the other side of the page. To avoid barcode recognition problems, **keep the top one third of the first inside page (i.e. the second page) of a form free of any data entry boxes.**

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Contact details

Information that is collected in the 'Contact details' section of the front of form is covered in the Front of Form standards. For OCR forms, the standard is for all contact details response boxes (except for the signature box) to be segmented, to allow the information to be captured and loaded to PIMS (if this requirement is specified by the BSC). Text provided in non-segmented boxes is unable to be captured by IFP.

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Section 3: Colour

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Drop out colour

Several colours that are widely used for paper forms with manually entered data do not scan well because, despite instruction to the contrary, data providers use blue pens to complete blue or bluish forms. Hence, there are fewer standard form colours for use with OCR forms.

The Despatch and Collection Unit (DCU) decide the actual colour used for forms based on operational considerations, for example, to assist with the "streaming" process, where incoming forms are sorted for processing. Survey areas should consider advising the DCU if they have several similar surveys in the field at the same time so different colours can be considered to avoid confusing respondents.

The following colours (generally in the red end of the spectrum) have been chosen for OCR forms because they are produced by a simple mix of two basic ink colours. This will make quality control more reliable. This standard uses the Pantone® Matching System (PMS), shown by the letters 'PMS' followed by a three or four digit number (for example, PMS 405, PMS 2735).

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Background colour

- Orange (PMS 123)
- Yellowish Orange (PMS 142)
- Orange (PMS 137)
- Orange Brown (PMS 150)
- Brownish Orange (PMS 157)
- Peach/Orange (PMS 1565)
- Reddish Brown (PMS 158)
- Reddish Pink (PMS 197)
- Reddish Pink (PMS 486)
- Pink (PMS 700)
- Pink (PMS 177)

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Text colour

Black (PMS 405U) is the only acceptable colour for the main text of OCR forms. Particular care should be taken to ensure that the 3mm clear zone is maintained around OCR fields to avoid black text interfering with scanning. PMS 405U should also be used for patch codes and any other 'black' elements printed on the form.

Other text (i.e. where near or part of OCR fields) should be in 100% screen of the background colour.

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Section 4: Layout

Introduction

This section covers broad OCR layout and is closely related to Section 5 (Other OCR Design Elements) which covers specific OCR-design elements and objects.

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Avoid data entry boxes on reverse of front page barcode position

To avoid barcode problems, keep the top one third of the first inside page (i.e. the second page) of a form free of any data entry boxes. This is not generally a problem because this page usually contains the 'Please read this first' and 'General Instructions' sections.

The front of form templates used by the CMU when creating OCR forms incorporate the standard address box and provide space for the barcode directly below the address information (see Diagram 1).

In correspondence, please quote this number ▼ Austr

Please read this first

Purpose of Collection
The Economic Activity Survey will provide key measures of the performance of Australian industries. These data are used in the

Exemptions from the standard front of form, or variations from the standard need to be discussed with CMU, DCM and DCU, prior to approval.

Measuring zones /'no go' area

Eye-guides and other form elements that are not in the drop-out colour are not to be within 3mm vertically or 3mm horizontally of any data entry box.

In some cases a need for 5mm horizontal clear space may be identified in form scanning testing. These cases include over-long lines of black text and those with long response spaces such as 'name' or some address fields.

A minimum of 3mm vertical spacing between data entry boxes is to be used throughout OCR forms. Separating scannable areas by a minimum of 3mm reduces the chance of scanning overlap, which reduces the frequency of scanning errors and subsequent repair costs. Exemption from this standard may be granted in the case of sparse matrices (where it is known that most respondents will only report a small number of data items). Requests for exemption from the standard must be discussed with CMU, DCU and DCM.

Data entry box borders and any lines inside text boxes must be in the drop-out colour.

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Reference points

To assist the OCR system in recognising and identifying forms, registration marks, page numbers and at least one other unique, numeric identifier are required on each page to act as reference points for OCR read areas and to identify the layout of the page being read.

On the front page where the page number is not available, the ABS logo and registration marks are used as reference points.

All other pages are to have page numbers at the top only, with two exceptions. These are:

- for blank pages, page numbers are necessary at both top and bottom (to act as reference points for OCR read areas and to identify the layout of the page being read); and
- for pages where a large part of the page is unused, a page number should be added at the bottom to help the scanners recognise the end of the page.

When page numbers are required to be placed at the bottom of some pages, it is generally appropriate to put page numbers on the bottom of all pages of the form for consistency.

It is important that these reference points are accurately located in the same position on each page. This also means that any trimming or guillotining of the form must be consistent for all pages of all copies of the form. Care needs to be taken to ensure that each sheet is an accurately sized sheet with undamaged edges available.

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Registration marks

For OCR forms and non-OCR forms which are also imaged, registration marks must be printed in solid black ink and be placed near the four corners of each page (except for the front page, where the ABS logo provides the reference point in the top left corner and therefore a registration mark is not required here). A minimum 3 mm clear space should be provided around each registration mark. Each registration mark should be 5mm wide and 2mm high. All registration marks should be at least 5mm from the side edges and top (or bottom) of the page.

Registration marks are included in the OCR graphic templates used by the CMU.

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Page number

The page number is also used as an identification mark for the OCR system. Page numbers are to be set in sans serif type as sans serif typeface (the line strokes of a letter without the varying thickness) is easily recognised by the scanner. Verdana is the standard sans serif type for ABS forms. A page number is required for scanning on every page except the front page.

The minimum space from the bottom of the page number to the top of the text in the first question/heading on a page is 5mm. Page recognition is compromised if the page number and question text are too close.

Intentionally blank pages must also include registration marks and page numbers.

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Section 5: Other OCR design elements

Introduction

This section covers specific OCR-friendly design elements and is closely related to section 4 (Layout) which covers broader OCR layout and design.

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Data entry boxes

When creating forms, CMU staff use InDesign graphic libraries, which provide graphic objects such as answer boxes that are of an acceptable size, spacing and alignment. If the need for a new object is identified then the standard libraries will be updated by the CMU.

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Numeric data entry boxes

Each digit is to have its own box drawn in the drop-out colour. If the number is large the fields are to be grouped by the use of commas (Diagram 2):



(Diagram 2)

Black text is not to be used for scannable commas, decimals or trailing zeros in data entry boxes.

Several numeric data entry box formats suitable for OCR forms are included in the standard InDesign Templates, and where a need for additional formats is identified these will be included as necessary.

Numeric data entry boxes should allow a white space of 8mm x 4mm per character. Older forms currently using the previous standard of 6mm x 4mm may continue to do so, however any forms converting to OCR or new survey forms should use the 8mm x 4mm standard.

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Commas and decimal points

Fields with decimal points impact on form definition and data files. If decimal places are to be reported they must be black if they are required to be visible on the image. They must occupy their own character space and must not touch the edge of an adjoining number box (Diagram 3).



Diagram 3

Commas must be in drop-out colour in all cases.

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Date separators

Date separators ('/') are to be black (Diagram 4).



Diagram 4

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Check or 'ballot' boxes

Check or ballot boxes, for instance those used for 'Mark all that apply' or 'yes/no' responses, are to be 5mm square.

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Reporting negatives

Where a negative value may be reported, an instruction to denote negatives with a sign and not brackets should be given above the box:

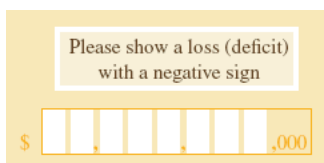


Diagram 5

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Free text answer spaces

Five different types of written in or free text occur on survey forms and these are treated differently in form design and processing. See Section 8 for details on text handling.

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Section 6: Special completion instructions ('Please read first')

Introduction

Special completion instructions are required to instruct respondents in how to complete scannable (or OCR) forms. These include instructions on the use of a black ball point pen to complete the form, printing within the boxes provided, correcting errors and reporting negative values.

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Standard OCR completion instructions

fail recognition (For example, a text response specifying capital expenditure as 'comput-rs' is recognisable and can be coded to 'computers'.)

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'General Comments'

All business forms are required to have a final 'Comments' box, and some forms also include boxes for comments in the body of the form. 'General comments' text can be quite lengthy, and segmented text boxes (as for body-of-form text) do not work as well for multiple lines. 'General comments' boxes are therefore not segmented, and this leads to respondents using free text handwriting in them.

Scanners can identify but not read free text handwriting and scanning will result in a recognition error which is flagged so that we are aware of the presence of text. Lists of forms with comments are then available to the relevant work areas who can check the image of the comment. For this to work, comments boxes on OCR'd forms use dropout colour for the boxes and the lines in the boxes. 'General comments' are split into two boxes and workflow routed to responsible areas (Diagram 8).

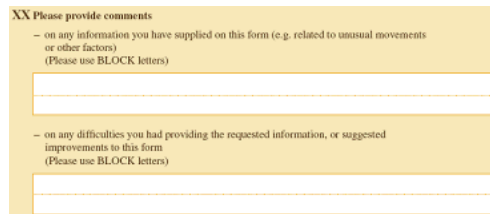


Diagram 8

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Non-numeric characters written in numeric data entry boxes

Non-numeric characters are often written in numeric data entry boxes. These include 'nil', 'n/a', 'negative' etc., and also include use of dashes (-) to indicate not in scope or a null response and brackets to denote negative values.

Completion instructions are not to use 'nil', 'n/a' or draw lines in data entry boxes because the scanning system can read common characters in numeric boxes, though with less reliability than for numbers.

There are no standard instructions for the use of numeric zero ('0'). Most BSCs discourage the use of zero to save respondent effort and recognition/repair effort. However, sometimes it may be desirable for respondents to record zero to indicate a particular result (e.g. crop failure), or to demonstrate that they have actually read a particular question if sequencing errors are anticipated. Survey-specific instructions can be used if appropriate (e.g. " ... complete failure of any crop ... denoted by '0' in the production column").

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'Front of form changes'

Changes made by respondents to the address and ABN are identified on receipt. They are then scanned and manually updated in the Provider Integration Management System (PIMS).

Telephone numbers, fax numbers and contact names are only captured for those surveys where special arrangements have been made to have them scanned and loaded to processing systems. The BSC must determine whether they want the contact details information to be captured, and alert the DCU to this requirement during the forms definitions stage; otherwise, the information will not be captured.

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'Miscellaneous' text

Comments are sometimes written next to data entry boxes or in empty spaces anywhere on a form. If these are too close to a recognition area (i.e. a data entry box) then they will be picked up as scanning errors and can be manually repaired or inspected. Otherwise they will be missed. Providing adequate space at the end of the form for respondents to write comments may help reduce the number of comments written elsewhere on the form.

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Section 8: Checklist

Introduction

This checklist is for use when designing and constructing OCR forms to ensure that key design elements have been included.

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Planning, conversion, overall design

- layout changes are often necessary for significantly changed forms; this is especially true for forms that have become very closely spaced over time as they have been iteratively modified or questions added.
- tight question layouts which fit on non-scanned forms may not fit when converted to scanning (e.g. multicolumn layouts, matrices, state-splits);

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Front and back of form

- patch code
- space for barcode
- segmented text boxes for 'contact details' boxes (excluding signature box)
- split 'final comments' box
- borders and any lines in all text boxes in dropout
- blank pages - use registration marks and page numbers top and bottom

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Every page

- all non-dropout text must be black
- recognition marks
- use black date separators
- put page numbers on the bottom of partially used and empty pages
- black decimal points

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Data entry areas

- segmented text boxes for 'body-of-form' comments
- adequate vertical and horizontal spacing of boxes
- adequate vertical and horizontal spacing of boxes from black text

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Survey Fax Design Standards

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SURVEY FAX DESIGN STANDARDS

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

Contents

- Introduction
- General Guidelines
- Use of fax technology at the ABS
- The future of fax technology at the ABS
- Typography
- Common Content
 - Letters
- Who should faxes be sent to?
- When should faxes be sent?
- Conclusion
- References

Introduction

Fax machines have been a useful addition to most businesses since the early 1980s. Most fax machines produced before 1990 used rolls of low quality paper, and produced poor/unclear transmissions. The top and bottom of pages may have been distorted, and vertical lines and spots from telephone line static were often visible on faxed images (Walker, 1994).

In addition, early fax technology was limited by both the quality of the images produced by the receiving fax machine, and by the number of respondents who had access to fax technology. For these reasons researchers were hesitant to fax survey forms, as the fax received by the respondent may have been very hard to read. Furthermore, if a poor quality form were to be completed and returned by fax, the quality of the image would diminish further (Walker, 1994).

Almost all fax machines manufactured since the early 1990s use regular A4 paper and produce clear reproductions, free from many of the flaws of earlier models. Modern machines automatically remove distortions and "noise", and transmissions are considerably faster. Faxes may also be used in conjunction with software designed to send faxes automatically, retry busy numbers and log the outcome of transmissions.

These improvements to the quality of faxed data, as well as the increasing number of Multi-function Peripherals (MFP), or combined fax, printer, scanner and photocopy devices, have made the fax machine an increasingly common business tool (Cullem, 2001).

Studies using identical short black and white questionnaires have found that there are no significant differences in data quality between the responses obtained by fax compared to mail (Vazzana & Bachmann, 1994). Similarly, there is no significant difference in levels of item non-response between fax and mail or fax and email forms (Cobanoglu, Warde & Moreo, 2001). Respondent error rates for fax responses are

comparable to mail responses for both open-ended and checklist questions (Dickson & MacLachlan, 1992; Dickson & MacLachlan, 1996). Respondents also voice positive attitudes about fax surveys and letters (Lensing et al., 2000; Rosen & Clayton, 1992).

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General Guidelines

While fax surveys have lower overall non-response rates and faster return times than mail surveys (Dickson & MacLachlan, 1996; Shannon & Arbet, 1998; Schreckhise, 2006; Au, 1994), and email surveys (Cobanoglu, Warde & Moreo, 2001), fax technology should be used in conjunction with other survey methods (Dickson & MacLachlan, 1996; Rosen & Clayton, 1992). For example, fax advance notice for Touchtone Data Entry (TDE) surveys have been found to be more effective than mail postcards (Rosen & Clayton, 1992) and phone calls (Chan, 1997), and fax reminder letters have been found to be more effective at increasing response rates in mail surveys than mail-out reminder letters (Au, 1994; Shannon & Arbet, 2004).

Where mixed mode surveys are to be conducted, the fax and mail forms should be as similar as possible to ensure consistent reporting from respondents, and to minimise mode effects (Dickson & MacLachlan, 1992). As very few changes to the letter standards are required to conform to fax typography, reminder and pre-approach letters can easily be sent by fax. The changes required to adapt a colour questionnaire to fax, however, are substantial, and we are unaware of any research into the relative effectiveness of colour forms versus fax forms.

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However, there is research comparing colour and black and white mail out questionnaires, and it is clear from this research that respondents prefer coloured forms (Phipps, Robertson & Keel, 1991). Interestingly, there are no significant differences in response rates between colour and black and white forms (Crittenden, Crittenden & Hawes, 1985; Lagarce & Washburn, 1995; Wheildon, 1990), although colour forms allow greater design flexibility in terms of distinguishing note boxes from answer boxes and so on.

Consequently, the quality of data obtained by colour forms will be superior to data from black and white forms, in terms of a reduction in non-sampling error. Where possible, colour forms should be used for mail-out surveys. Therefore, including fax in the initial despatch for mixed mode surveys that also include a colour mail out form is not recommended, as common content cannot be assured. However, fax forms may be used in the following cases:

- in the initial despatch if only black and white mail-out forms are being used (i.e. for surveys in which fewer than 200 forms are printed)
- in the initial despatch for ongoing survey respondents who prefer fax, or who are difficult to contact by mail
- where timeliness is an issue, toward the end of the Intensive Follow Up (IFU) period, a black and white "fax friendly" version of a paper form may faxed
- Fax friendly forms may also be dispatched earlier in the survey cycle to respondents who intend to return their form by fax
- Short versions of some forms (containing key data items) may be dispatched by fax to respondents who would not otherwise agree to complete the form, or who have special reporting requirements. These forms are not common and may deviate from the fax standards; however, all deviations must be approved in advance through the formal approval process (eg. Labour Price Index (LPI) "FaxTables").

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Use of Fax Technology at the ABS

The ABS regularly faxes black and white self-administered forms to business survey respondents. While there were some concerns about the speed and quality of fax transmissions in the past, technological advancements in fax machines and survey design software have made fax a feasible despatch method for black and white forms. In addition to improved graphics, the most significant improvement to modern fax technology is the ability to send bulk faxes electronically, rather than one by one manually. However, as faxes are always black and white, the superior quality of coloured mail out questionnaires makes them the preferred mode of distribution for paper-based self completed forms.

The ABS is not alone in increasing the use of fax technology. The U.S. Bureau of the Census and the U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics regularly utilise fax technology to send advance notices and non-response follow up letters. However, the effects of the long term use of fax for surveys forms are unknown. Many researchers express the concern that the positive effects of fax will be negated once the novelty of the mode wears off (Rosen & Clayton, 1992; Vazzana & Bachmann, 1994; Walker, 1994). For this reason, the use of fax transmissions should be regularly reviewed.

The ABS currently uses an automated fax system to send and receive faxes. This system is a Paperless Fax Image Reporting System (PFIRS) called a "fax gateway", and is designed to integrate fax technology with computer software and existing databases. The fax gateway can send and receive faxes automatically, and does not require the incoming faxes to be printed in order for the data to be recorded.

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The ABS does not expect respondents to have a PFIRS in place. The majority of respondents receive all fax transmissions as printed paper copies, not as digital files. These paper faxes can be filled out by hand and returned by fax. For this reason, it is vital that all faxes sent are of the highest possible quality, to ensure the paper reproduction received by the respondent is clear (Dickson & MacLachlan, 1992).

All mail out questionnaires have a freecall telephone number printed on the cover page. Respondents are able to call and request a new form which, if requested near to the close off date, can be faxed. The majority of quarterly and annual collections have a "fax-friendly" or black and white .pdf version of the form designed for this purpose. The .pdf fax-friendly forms contain fields that can be edited electronically, so that the following details can be entered prior to faxing:

- label details (business name, respondent's name and address)
- ABN
- due date
- reference period (where relevant)
- reference number (which appears at the top of every page)

When requested, fax-friendly forms can be sent directly from the computer of the operator who answered the respondent's call. The respondent should be told how many pages the form is, as many respondents may be reluctant to be sent a particularly long fax. For this reason the use of fax should be limited to respondents who request a fax version, or who agree to be sent a fax during IFU.

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Forms without a fax-friendly version should not be sent by fax as the colour of the mail out questionnaire may distort the image received by

the respondent. Furthermore, the background colour will also have to be printed (in black) at the respondent's end, slowing the transmission and using up excessive amounts of the respondent's ink. Similarly, black and white photocopies of colour forms should not be faxed.

In addition to the freecall number, all business survey forms are printed with a fax number. Respondents may return surveys by fax for the cost of a local call (about 25c), and are encouraged to do so towards the end of the survey cycle. Currently, the ABS PFIRS is run using a fax gateway which receives all incoming faxes, and sends them directly to a work group database. The database receives the incoming faxes as an image file, and the data is then read by Optical Character Recognition (OCR) or manually keyed.

Fax gateways must have a high capacity to ensure respondents are not constantly getting a busy signal when they attempt to fax back their form. The alternative is to use an external system, which stores incoming faxes in memory offsite. This is not recommended, as it may lead to confidentiality problems.

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The future of fax technology at the ABS

Integrated OCR/form design software which enables PFIRS (e.g. Teleform) has been on the market for some time, and similar systems (e.g. electronic fax machines) can send and receive faxes as email attachments using programs such as Microsoft fax (Cobanoglu, Warde & Moreo, 2001). Currently, however, the ABS does not have OCR capability for mail out forms returned by fax, and this data must be recorded manually. Returned "fax friendly" forms, however, with the inclusion of barcodes, should enable OCR and will consequently be significantly less costly and resource intensive to process.

In 2007 the ABS received approximately 45,000 completed forms by fax. Of these, only twenty per cent were fax friendly forms. The other eighty per cent (approximately 36,000) were mail out forms returned by fax, which were then manually keyed.

Due to the additional expense of manually keying data, the use of fax friendly forms should be encouraged for respondents who intend to return their form by fax. Similarly, respondents should be discouraged from faxing a mail out form, and instead be offered a fax friendly copy. Pending further improvements to fax friendly forms, the relevant data will be collected using OCR. This would greatly reduce the need for manually entering data.

Any fax friendly forms which are unable to be identified by OCR must be entered into the system manually. Consequently the effectiveness of ABS fax-OCR facilities and fax friendly form design should be reviewed regularly to ensure that manual data entry is kept to a minimum.

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Typography

While fax machines are no longer affected by many of the flaws of older models, there are still two major limitations:

1. the speed of a fax transmission is directly related to the amount of ink on the page, and
2. fax machines are unable to send or receive colour.

For these reasons, all faxes must be black ink on white paper, with as few pictures and graphics as possible, as they slow the transmission.

Faxed information sheets and pre-approach, induction, cover, reminder and other letters should conform to letter standards with particular emphasis on minimising the use of bold text. Only key words, such as headings and the return fax number should be in bold.

Furthermore, as fax machines can only send and receive black and white images, lines which in a colour form would be solid colour or white must be changed to black, and shading should not be used. Fax friendly forms must conform to the black and white form design standards but, to aid form reading by OCR, lines on fax friendly forms may be in 1 point for answer boxes and 1.5 point for totals boxes.

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As with fax letters, the use of bold text in fax forms should be minimised, with only key words, totals boxes and headings presented in bold. Question text must also appear in bold font to ensure consistency between mail out and fax forms. This will increase the sending time of the fax and hence, faxing forms with particularly long questions should be avoided, regardless of the total length of the form.

As respondents receive all pages of the survey as single sheets of paper (unlike the booklet format of mail out surveys) it is important to ensure the reference number is printed on every page of the form. This will ensure that a returned form can be processed even when some pages are not returned (e.g. if the cover page is missing). The editable reference number field on .pdf fax-friendly forms will automatically copy the reference number to every page of the form. It is therefore particularly important that the reference number is entered accurately.

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Common Content

Just as with mail surveys, response rates for fax surveys are increased by freecall numbers, advance notice, cover and reminder letters (Au, 1994). For this reason, appropriate IFU procedures should be followed.

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Letters

Advance notice (or new-on letters for new respondents for continuing surveys) and reminders for outstanding surveys are usually issued to ABS survey respondents in conjunction with IFU telephone contact. If fax advance notice and reminders are used, they should conform to the ABS letter standards with the modifications specified in the section on typography. In addition, the following amendments should be made to fax reminder letters:

- While the title of the collection and the reference period may appear in 12 point bold, the sub headings "first reminder", "second reminder" and "Your survey form is still outstanding and is required immediately" should appear in 12 point plain font.
- For the third reminder the heading "URGENT" should remain in capital letters but appear in 12 point plain font rather than bold.
- The paragraph "If you have already completed and returned the form, thank you for your timely cooperation and please ignore this reminder." should appear in 12 point plain font.
- The fax number should be provided as well as the freecall telephone number, and both should appear in 10 point bold.

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All fax transmissions should be addressed to the intended respondent of the survey. The cover page should include a salutation with the respondent's name, and should conform to the ABS letter standards. If the name of the respondent is unknown, the fax should be directed to an appropriate respondent. For example "Attention: Chief Financial Officer" should be printed in 12 point bold on the top of the cover page.

It is possible to personalise salutations for electronic faxes by overlaying data from an external database or file. Provided this technology is available, the respondent's or business's name can be included in all faxes using PIMS. In line with ABS letter standards, this function should be used to include a name in all salutations.

While mail surveys include a correctly addressed return envelope, a fax survey relies on the respondent to accurately dial the return fax number. For this reason, the covering letter should include a modified confidentiality statement which stresses the importance of correctly entering the return fax number to ensure the confidentiality of the data. In addition, the covering letter should include instructions directing the receiver to notify the ABS if a fax is received in error.

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An example covering letter for a form dispatched by fax is below. This letter contains a personalised salutation, instructions for those who receive a form in error, and instructions for the respondent which outline the importance of correctly entering the return fax number:

ATTENTION: [Respondent's name]

Attached is a copy of the survey form for the [Survey name] for [reference period].

This survey is being conducted by the ABS under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. The Act ensures that the information you provide is treated as strictly confidential and will be used for statistical purposes only.

The ABS will maintain security and confidentiality of your data, once we receive it. A free fax number is provided on the front of the survey form for the return of your survey. **Care should be taken to enter the fax number correctly to ensure your confidential information is not misdirected.**

Please complete this form and return it to the ABS by **dd/mm/yyyy**

If you want to send the data by fax but have particular concerns, or need help completing this form please contact us. We can often advise on ways of making this task easier for you.

Telephone

1800xxxxxx

Facsimile

1300xxxxxx

Mail

Australian Bureau of Statistics
Reply Paid 76746
Sydney NSW 2000

Thank you,
[Name of ABS officer]

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Who should faxes be sent to?

Fax transmission is limited to respondents with access to a fax machine. As few households have fax machines, household surveys are not ideal for fax data transmission (Au, 1994). However, fax can be suitable for businesses, as a great majority of businesses have fax capability.

Providers who prefer returning their survey by fax rather than mail, and have fax capability, can request communications be sent by fax. Faxes should only be sent to new survey respondents after initial contact is made by phone (Walker, 1994; Klassen & Jacobs, 2001) or mail. Ongoing survey respondents should be notified by their usual contact method that a fax option is available if they provide a valid fax number (Schreckhise, 2006). However, fax may not be a suitable mode for all collections and should not be offered unless a fax friendly form is available.

All respondents who select fax as a contact method should be told when to expect faxes, and asked to check that the machine is left on. In addition, respondents should be asked to check that there is adequate paper and ink to receive fax transmissions. Fax can be a useful addition to ongoing surveys, as advanced notice letters and reminders for regular reporting can be faxed to businesses automatically at preprogrammed intervals. However, faxes longer than one or two pages should never be sent without the respondent's prior permission.

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When should faxes be sent?

In a study of a survey with monthly reporting by fax, the U.S. Bureau of the Census found that reminder faxes should be sent to respondents who had not reported after the third week of the month (Appel, Petunas & Russell, 1995). Similarly, Rosen and Clayton (1992) found that non-response prompt faxes should be sent a minimum of 3 days prior to the cutoff date. If they are sent any later the response rate drops significantly (Rosen & Clayton, 1992). Both these studies were conducted with sub-annual collections using a single reminder letter.

The implication of this research on the use of fax reminder letters at the ABS is that, regardless of the frequency of the collection, the final reminder should be dispatched early enough to ensure the respondent has ample time to complete and return the form before cutoff. For sub-annual collections the third reminder letter should be faxed to respondents 3 to 7 days before the final cutoff date, while the final fax reminders for annual collections may be dispatched 7 to 14 days before the cutoff date.

In mixed mode surveys, the fax reminder should be sent a few days later than the mail reminders. This increases the likelihood that mail and fax respondents will receive the reminder on the same day. Similarly, where fax is an initial dispatch method in a mixed mode survey the fax form should be dispatched a few days after the mail dispatch to ensure all respondents receive the form within the same time frame.

Faxes sent at the request of the provider (e.g. during IFU) should be dispatched as soon as possible after the request is made. This will ensure that the fax arrives quickly, and that the provider is prepared for the transmission (i.e. the fax machine is on and there is plenty of paper and ink).

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Conclusion

While mail is the preferred mode of dispatch for self completed forms, there are circumstances in which the use of fax may be suitable. Fax has the advantage of being faster than mail, and as such it is suitable for fax-friendly forms to be dispatched to respondents, with their permission, near the end of the IFU period. Respondents who intend to return their form by fax should be sent a fax-friendly form, as a mail out form returned by fax cannot be read by OCR and is, consequently, much more costly to process.

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COMMON STANDARDS TO ALL ELECTRONIC FORMS

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the

online version.

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- Introduction
- Standard components
- Wording and language
- Screen resolution
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Introduction

This section identifies a number of basic standards and elements common to all electronic forms.

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Standard components

All electronic forms should offer at least the same level of help, information and instructions as their paper equivalent. Electronic forms should also be as visually similar to their paper equivalents as possible. There are several exceptions to this, namely, font and font size, use of colour and use of separate worksheets for different sections, front of form, comments etc.

While the presentation of these components may vary slightly, conceptually these are:

- an ABS 'Front of Form' that includes business name, address and contact details as well as the other standard ABS 'Front of Form' elements;
- 'Please read this first' completion and other instructions section;
- reporting instructions, notes, help, includes and excludes;
- a final general comments box; and
- a time taken question.

In addition, electronic forms should also include:

- the standard (for any particular form type) 'How to use this form' section in the form itself, including keyboard shortcuts; and
- a 'How to submit this form' section at the end of the form regarding security, saving and submitting to the ABS.
- a separate instruction booklet, usually in pdf format.

For long forms (five or more separate response sheets) the following are recommended:

- a 'Contents' page at the beginning of the form, outlining the location of the sections, sub sections and primary questions.
- space for comments at the bottom of each sheet. Due to the navigation in electronic forms, it is more convenient (less burdensome) for the respondent to comment as they move through the form. Electronic forms enable frequent commenting because page space is not an issue.

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Wording and language

In keeping with the principle that electronic forms are based on paper ones, all content and associated (paper) form standards should remain the same or match as closely as possible within the constraints of Excel. This includes the use of lines and boxes, the presentation of notes with questions, formatting and overall question wording.

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Screen resolution

Forms are designed to fit in a maximised 800x600 window on a 15" monitor running at 24m colours, with the width of the body of the form extending over the full width of an 800x600 screen.

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Colours

The only colours currently used are two shades of grey, plus black and white.

Monitor settings and individual colour perception both affect the way the respondent views colour on their PC screen. In line with the principle that e-forms should be kept simple and designed with the least sophisticated system in mind, a monochrome colour scheme should work for any design.

The colour specification for all electronic forms is therefore:

- they are designed to use 24 bit colour; and
- when setting the colours in custom colour palettes, the correct colours are Grey (222) and Light Grey (244).
- colours can be set by going to <Tools> then <Options> and clicking on the "Color" tab. You need to select one of the colours in the palette and then select "Modify", as shown in Diagram 2.1. Choose the "Custom" tab and type in "222" or "244" to all three components of the colour model, as shown in Diagram 2.2.

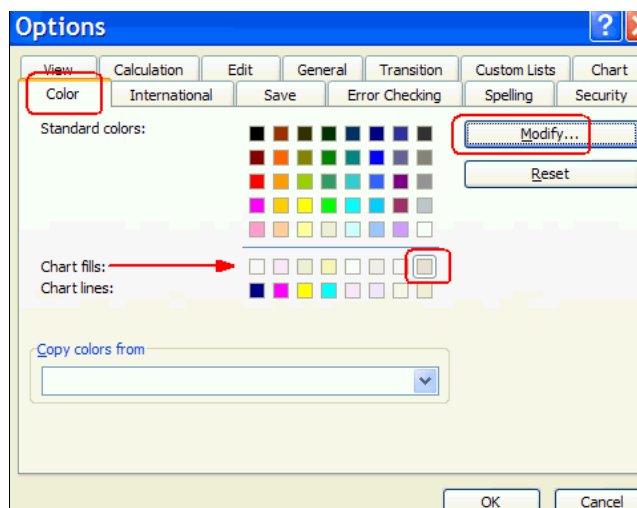


Diagram 2.1

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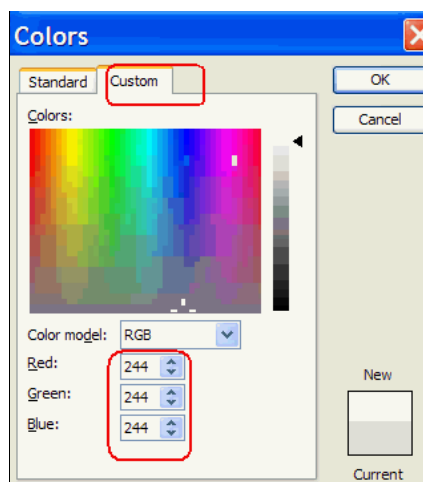


Diagram 2.2

Coloured forms are currently under consideration with the aim of providing specifications that will allow matching to the paper form equivalent. As with paper forms, it is most important to have a strong contrast between the background and notes colours and the text. The background colour should not be highly saturated in order to provide good contrast with text.

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Fonts

'True Type' Arial is used throughout all electronic forms. Sizes are based on those for paper forms:

- 24 point bold for Title of Collection;
- 18 point bold for Sub-title of Collection;
- 14 point bold for Section headings, due date and question numbers;
- 12 point bold for Questions;
- 12 point plain for Front of Form and Sub-questions; and
- 10 point plain for notes, includes/excludes and other explanatory text.

For Multi-Unit Excel forms it is acceptable to use a smaller font for the column headings in order to keep the spreadsheet to a reasonable size.

While Arial is the only acceptable font for Excel forms, Arial, Verdana and MS Sans Serif are the order of preference for Web forms.

For text on the form that is not a question or explanation for the respondent, such as office use codes, it is best to differentiate the text. On paper forms, the sans serif font Verdana is used to contrast with the serif font Times. For Excel and Web forms use Times for office codes.

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Computer Assisted Interviewing (CAI)

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For information on Computer Assisted Interviewing(CAI) Standards in this manual, select:

- [Computer Assisted Interviewing \(CAI\) Interface Design Standards.](#)
- [Summary for use by CAI Developers](#)

Excel Forms

[Contents >> Electronic Forms >> Excel Forms](#)

This section contains the following subsection :

- Excel Form Design Standards
- Main Features of Excel Forms
- Pre-Despatch Checks
- Multi-Unit Excel Form Specific Standards

Excel Form Design Standards

[Contents >> Electronic Forms >> Excel Forms >> Excel Form Design Standards](#)

EXCEL FORM DESIGN STANDARDS - INTRODUCTION

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

Contents

- Background
- Policy on use of Excel in the ABS for Electronic Data Reporting (EDR)
- Use of spreadsheets
- Broad design principles

Background

The Excel Form Design Standards developed by Data Collection Methodology (DCM) include the standards common to all electronic forms as well as those standards specific to Excel forms.

Other parts of the standards and guidelines within the Forms Design Standards Manual cover broad principles, and will eventually cover Web Instruments.

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Policy on use of Excel in the ABS for Electronic Data Reporting (EDR)

Briefly, at present Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) policy is to:

- minimise the use of EDR;
- ensure that any EDR undertaken is secure; and to
- handle EDR requests and instrument generation centrally.

Several Excel forms have been developed as part of the ABS' response to the Electronic Transactions Act (ETA) to accommodate businesses and people who insist or need to report to us electronically.

To minimise costs for what is expected to be an interim low volume solution with a limited-life, these electronic forms will not include any validation, links to databases, or initial information about a provider such as contact information as is the case with many paper forms.

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Use of spreadsheets

The details of spreadsheet construction for data capture have two audiences - areas that have instruments already in place and areas that have Electronic Transactions Act related requests from providers who insist on reporting electronically.

Where spreadsheets are already in use the aim should be to incorporate as much of these Excel standards as practicable - this should be done in consultation with DCM, who have an approval role for all business electronic collection forms.

In the case of unavoidable Electronic Transactions Act and other requests, the standards are for information only because the necessary spreadsheets for data capture will be constructed in line with these standards by the Collection Management Unit (CMU).

Any question structures or paper form design elements that are not catered for by these standards will be developed by DCM, CMU and TA-ESG as necessary and then included in the bank of template forms.

At present, spreadsheets should only be used in the limited circumstances where:

- i. we need to accommodate providers who insist on reporting electronically because of their right to do so under the Electronic Transactions Act, or the ESDC Clearing House considers it justified on the grounds of security, cost, type of provider, whether an existing instrument exists and what other alternatives exist;
- ii. for structured data files (including 'Administrative by-product') where provider contact and liaison are such that we can be sure that the (preferably automatic) mapping to an ABS format is well understood and will continue to be accurate. If only a transport medium for a

data extract is needed there is a case to be made for using a .csv file or Multi-Unit (Horizontal) Excel form; and
iii. they are already in reasonably widespread use for ESG (e.g. Public Finance Local Government).

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Broad Design Principles

In addition to Excel-specific standards, Excel EDR instruments should also use and conform to the common standards for all electronic forms. See the remainder of the ABS Forms Design Standards Manual for principles and guidelines regarding layout, question construction and formatting. There are some departures from this, particularly for Multi-Unit forms, for example using smaller fonts. These are discussed in the relevant sections.

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Main Features of Excel Forms

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MAIN FEATURES OF EXCEL FORMS

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

Contents

- Introduction
- Main features of Excel forms
- General Construction and Layout
- Macros
- Worksheets and sections
- Colour
- Data entry and movement
- 'Total' entry cells
- Text entry cells
- Cell formats
- Dimensions, margins and borders
- Radio buttons and drop down menus
- Tagging/naming data items

Introduction

This section outlines the main features of Excel forms and includes brief notes to aid in their construction.

In addition to Excel-specific standards, Excel forms should also conform to the common standards for all electronic forms. (See the remainder of the ABS Forms Design Standards Manual for principles and guidelines regarding layout, question construction and formatting.)

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Main features of Excel forms

The main features of Excel forms are specified in this section, divided up into:

- General Construction and Layout
- Macros
- Worksheets and Sections
- Colour
- Data Entry and Movement
- 'Total' Entry Cells
- Text Entry Cells
- Cell Formats
- Dimensions, Margins and Borders
- Radio Buttons
- Tagging data items

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General Construction and Layout

There should be an additional "E" at the end of all form IDs on the front of form to clearly indicate, in the Forms Repository view, that it is the Excel version of the paper form. If an "E" is already used in the form name, then use an "X" at the end.

Layout of Excel form content is based directly on the paper form. This includes all instructions and notes except any paper-specific ones. For example, "Tick all that apply" should be replaced with "Please indicate with an 'X'..." and references to reply paid envelopes should be removed.

The text of notes, definitions and instructions should align under the first letter of text, not under the dotpoint. However, this preferred formatting should only be done where practical, and where time permits.

The bottom edge of response boxes should align with the text, or with the last line of text for questions with more than one line of text. In order to achieve this, you may have to use merged cells for the question text. For example:

e) Total Government grants and subsidies (current and capital)				
--	--	--	--	--

Diagram 3.1

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It is possible to merge a number of cells across rows and columns in order have enough space to fit the question without the need to increase row heights. Using tall row heights for questions makes it impossible to align response boxes with the question text, so this practice should be avoided where possible. Response boxes should be correctly aligned because it makes it easier for the respondent to identify the correct place of response. Diagram 3.2 shows an example of the use of merged cells with and without formatting. The merged cells are identified by the lack of grid lines:

(d) Of the employees identified in part (c) please estimate the number of employees involved with information technology and communication	
(d) Of the employees identified in part (c) please estimate the number of employees involved with information technology and communication	

Diagram 3.2

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Forms are designed at a screen resolution of 800x600 to accommodate the lowest resolution in widespread use, and, allowing for the white space at the bottom of worksheets, so that they print off to closely resemble their paper equivalents.

BSCs have the option to include comments boxes at the end of each part (worksheet) to enable the respondent to document any problems or concerns at the time they occur. This is currently a feature of the Local Government Finance (LGF) Excel form.

For example:

Please provide comments

- on revised figures for any quarter
- on any major contributors to Other revenue
- on any unusual figures you have supplied in this section, particularly when compared with previous quarters
- on any questions which may have caused problems in this section

(hold the Alt key and press Enter to start a new line)

End of Part 1 - Statement of Financial Performance - Revenue

Diagram 3.3

If comment boxes are used, then the BSC's business process and IT systems may be affected, and the BSC should be made aware of this so that they can plan to identify and deal with the extra information being collected.

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Macros

There are two types of Macros used for Excel forms, the first are form formatting macros used by the form developers to construct the form, protect it etc. These should not be stored in the form.

The second type of Macro is meant for use by the respondent, and is stored within the form workbook. Note that Excel forms should not include macros unless there is a specific need that can only be achieved by using a macro. Such a macro is "Add Rows" in the IFAB Form 90 Excel workbook. These macros are developed by TA for ESG. Such macros should undergo extensive testing with providers and ABS processes (Secure Deposit Box). Note: care is required as some macros will not pass through our security systems and/or the provider's security.

Macros for use by the respondent and represented by a button in the worksheet should be positioned intuitively. For example "Add Row" should be positioned at the end of the last row and column, where the respondent would already be looking when the need for additional rows arises. Buttons should not appear at the top of columns where they can be confused with column headings. Diagram 3.4 shows an example of where a button should be placed in relation to the relevant response box:

	Add Subsidiary
--	----------------

Diagram 3.4

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Worksheets and Sections

All Excel forms are divided into worksheets of varying length that represent the sections or parts of the paper form. The main use and features of the worksheets will be described below. Excel forms may use more parts and sections than the paper form equivalents to aid navigation and for convenience in assembling the form. It can be easier to have standard parts (Please read first, How to use this form, How to submit, Time taken) separate, so that they can be inserted as a sheet into new forms.

All forms should start with a standard 'How to use this form' worksheet about navigation and saving, followed by the 'Front of Form' and 'Please read this first' worksheets. For long forms, a 'Content' worksheet should be included after the 'Please read this first' sheet. This describes where to find the relevant sections, for example:

enterprise group. It is suggested that you use the following table of contents to determine which questions you should answer.

Part	Tab
Part 1 General information	Part 1
Part 2 Employment	Part 2
Part 3 Income items	Part 3
Part 4 Expense items	Part 4
Part 5 Inventories	Part 5

Diagram 3.5

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Each Part or Section has an Excel 'tab' at the bottom of the screen that can be used to navigate between worksheets. Tabs should be labelled with the part headings, not the part numbers (or letters).

The exception to this rule is for a survey with a large number of worksheets, such as the Survey of International Investment (SII), where it is not practical to use the full part heading for every worksheet tab. The following example shows how the tabs should be labelled:

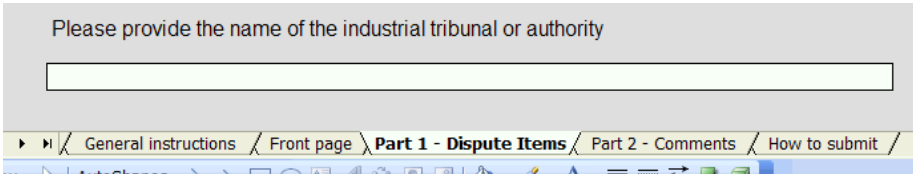


Diagram 3.6

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This example shows how tabs are labelled when there are a large number of worksheets:

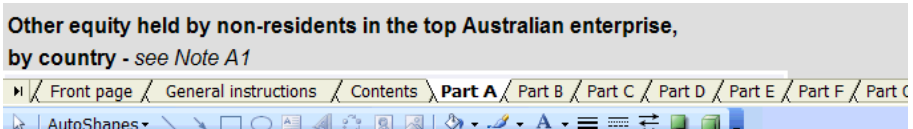


Diagram 3.7

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If there are simply too many sheets to avoid some of them scrolling out of view horizontally, an additional instruction should be included in the 'How to use ..' section:

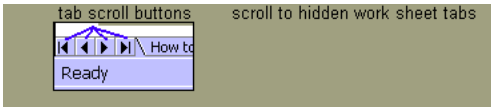


Diagram 3.8

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Inside a given section/part/worksheet the content is displayed in one scrolling 'page', though in some cases this results in only a portion of the screen being used. Subsequently, references to paper form page numbers are removed and inter-page gaps and spacing adjusted to give an even, continuous, display.

Each worksheet ends with a note to the effect that it is the end of that worksheet. 'End of part' notifications should be placed in the bottom right hand corner of the 'page'. The natural navigation of the eye will make this area of the worksheet the last part viewed by the respondent. By putting the 'End of part' notification there, respondent eye movement is reduced. The 'End of part' notifications should also be meaningful by describing which part has ended. For example:

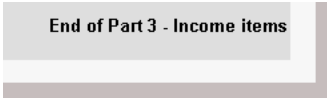


Diagram 3.9

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Links should not be used in spreadsheets. This is because tabs are commonly used to navigate through the Excel form and links in the form do not have the functionality that respondents have come to expect of hyper links (for example, hitting 'backspace' will not take the respondent back to the last page visited).

Colour

Along with black and white, two shades of grey are used. When setting the colours in custom colour palettes, the correct colours are Grey (222) and Light Grey (244).

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Data Entry and Movement

Movement around the spreadsheet is possible using several keystroke shortcuts:

- Tab (to next active cell),
- Shift+Tab (previous active cell),
- Control+PageDown (to next sheet),
- Control+PageUp (previous sheet),
- PageUp/Down keys,
- arrow keys and
- the mouse.

Movement and data entry in the spreadsheet are limited in two ways:

- 'inside the form' all cells where the provider should not enter data are coloured grey and are locked (data entry cells are white, as with paper forms). This includes the restriction that 'Total' cells cannot have data entered into them. They use formulas to reflect the cumulative totals of their contributing cells, and are 'greyed out' with default zeros; and
- the 'unused' areas of the spreadsheet 'outside the form' should be turned off to prevent inadvertent data entry. In addition, horizontal movement away from the form area is prevented by hiding all columns to the right of the active area to prevent users scrolling off to the right and losing the application. Because it is not necessary and allowing it to display could be confusing, the horizontal scroll bar is turned off. It is turned off in <Tools>, <options> then <view>.

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The physical act of vertical scrolling cannot be prevented, however, the rows below the active cells can be locked and hidden, which prevents the appearance of activity 'outside the form'.

There should be no default zeros in any data entry fields. This is because a zero may indicate a response, where there really is none, which in turn contributes to the estimates, distorting the average number of genuine 'zero' responses.

Open (data entry) cells include the business name and ABN boxes so respondents can change them.

All response fields should accept alpha/numeric data. For example, respondents should be able to enter the word 'Nil' to indicate no response, where a numeric response may be expected.

Data entered into space intended for numeric responses should be formatted to be right justified.

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'Total' Entry Cells

Unlike paper forms, 'total' and other similar data entry cells should not have a thicker border because testing has shown that users frequently misinterpret or confuse it with the focus/active cell indication.

Where total cells are used in paper forms, totalling in the Excel form should be automatic. Where appropriate, manual data entry in to total cells should be prevented. 'Total' cells will therefore appear with default zeros due to containing a formula.

Formulas should be written into total cells to decrease respondent burden and increase data quality. If summation is automated for one total, then this should be consistent throughout the form for all other totals. There are four types of totals:

- Cumulative total within a question
- Cumulative total over multiple questions
- Fixed total to indicate what the subparts should add to, that is, "100%"
- Fixed total that should be equal to an earlier question

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Where the total refers to other parts of the form, this should be noted after "Total";

- where the total sums over more than one question the note should state which questions sum to make the total. For example:

12 Total income [sum of Questions 5(c) to 11] \$ 0,000
--

Diagram 3.10

- where a total should be equal to an earlier question, a note can be added for example "Should equal Question xx";
- where a total only includes figures from one question, a note is not required.

Greyed out cells for fixed totals should be visually different from greyed out cells for cumulative totals. In particular, cells that have a fixed total value for reinforcing how the question should be answered, for example "100 %", should be differentiated from those that cumulatively total. As shown in diagram 3.11:

- Fixed totals have no cell borders and no note.
- Cumulative (formula) totals that sum the respondent's inputs should have a cell border and a note, for example "Should add to 100%". For example:

Casual.....		%
Part Time		%
Full Time		%
Total	100	%

Fixed total to indicate to the respondent that the three parts should add to 100 percent

Casual.....		%
Part Time		%
Full Time		%
Total (should add to 100)	0	%

Cumulative total that aids the respondent in ensuring the answer adds to 100 percent

Diagram 3.11

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Text entry cells

Text and comments boxes present particular difficulties in spreadsheets with respect to wrapping, paragraph breaks and viewing during and after the cursor focus is in the cell. Data entered into cells intended for alpha responses should be formatted to be left justified and text in comments boxes should be forced to wrap (so that the text does not go past the right edge of the comments box).

Areas for text entry consist of a single row of horizontally merged cells. The row height should be adjusted to show enough space.

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Cell Formats

Cell formats can help avoid incorrect responses by identifying what is expected in the cell. For example choosing text or numeric formats will automatically left or right justify the inputs. Percentage formats can be used to reinforce the need for responses to be expressed as a percentage, and numeric fields can be set to zero decimal places to force whole dollar amounts. This is achieved by:

- Select the response cell(s) and choosing <Format>, <Cells> from the menu.
- Choose the appropriate format, for example, where whole dollar responses are expected, select "Number" and change the "Decimal places" to zero, as shown in Diagram 3.12. By default the number formats show negative numbers with a negative sign and black text. This is the correct format for an Excel form and should not be changed.

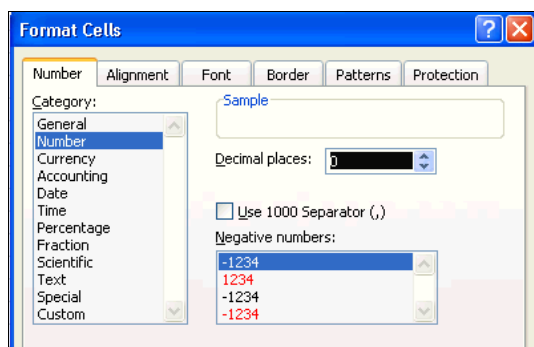


Diagram 3.12

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A numeric format still allows text entry, but will left justify instead of right. Therefore, respondents are still able to enter a 'nil' response if they wish.

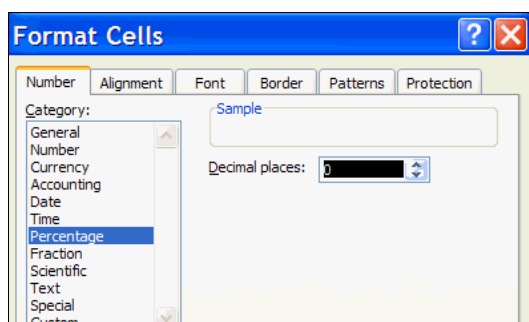


Diagram 3.13.1

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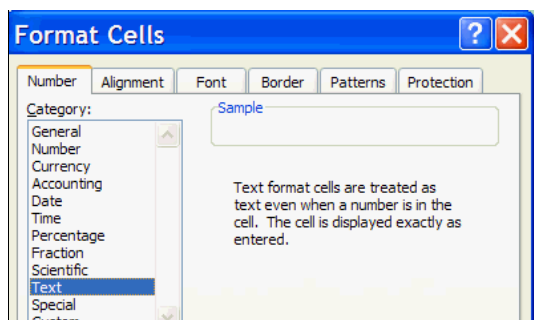


Diagram 3.13.2

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Dimensions, Margins and Borders

ABS Excel forms are designed to print out to the width of an A4 form, but absolute dimensions lose most of their meaning when using different screen and window sizes, fonts and resolutions.

Excel measures cell width in terms of standard font characters, as specified in Microsoft Excel Help (2003):

"The number that appears in the **Standard column width** box is the average number of digits 0-9 of the standard font (standard font is: The default text font for worksheets. The standard font determines the default font for the Normal cell style (Microsoft Excel Help, 2003)."

The ABS Excel templates use a 'standard font' of Arial 10 point.

Column widths must vary from sheet to sheet to allow for a variety of layouts. There are a number of different column settings for different page layouts, these are partly automated through the formatting macros, and can be adjusted for the needs of the form.

The width of margins are relevant to printing only. Minimum margin requirements vary from printer to printer and can be altered in: <File>, <Page Setup> then <Margins>. The top and bottom margins are set to at least 1cm.

Cell borders are set to the finest solid black line for data entry cells, and the second finest for white borders.

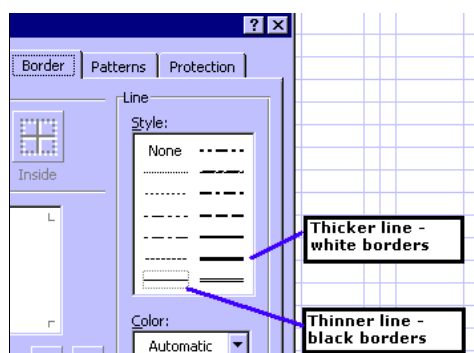


Diagram 3.14

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Radio Buttons and drop down menus

The use of radio buttons and drop down boxes in Excel forms is under consideration. Radio buttons may be used for mutually exclusive yes/no or choose one only questions. One advantage of using a radio button is that the round shape of the response spaces help to differentiate mutually exclusive type questions from 'tick all that apply' type questions. Drop down boxes do not work as well and should only be used sparingly for lists of response items. Long lists in drop down menus are problematic due to the need for scrolling, when using drop down menus the entire list should be visible when activated, i.e. without the need for scrolling.

Drop down menus share the same risk of ordering effects as printed lists, for example, respondents tend to answer in the top third of the list. If there is some natural order to the items in the list, this order should be used, otherwise the list should be ordered alphabetically. These tools should not be used unless thoroughly tested with providers.

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Tagging/naming data items

In the future eforms will be required to have a 'named range' defined for each single entry field or column of entry fields. The 'named range' is given a unique label so that any individual entry field can be retrieved.

The names used for the 'named range' will be important in reducing the amount of concordance work done between exporting data from the eform and the eventual load process to the Input Data Warehouse (IDW). The Blaise system name should be matched to each data cell. The Collection Management Unit should be consulted when tagging an Excel form.

To name a cell(s) select and highlight the relevant cell(s). Go up into the name box located on the left side of the screen under the toolbar. As shown in Diagram 3.15, type a name for the cell(s) then press enter to save the name. For example:

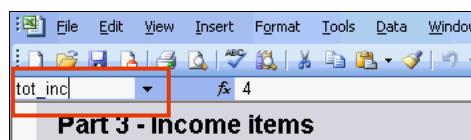


Diagram 3.15

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Alternatively you can open the 'Name' dialogue box by choosing <Insert>, <Name> then <Define> from the main menu as is shown in Diagram 3.16. Type a name in the "Names in workbook:" box, then go to "Refers to:" box, delete the reference that appears, if any, then using the mouse highlight the relevant cells. For example:

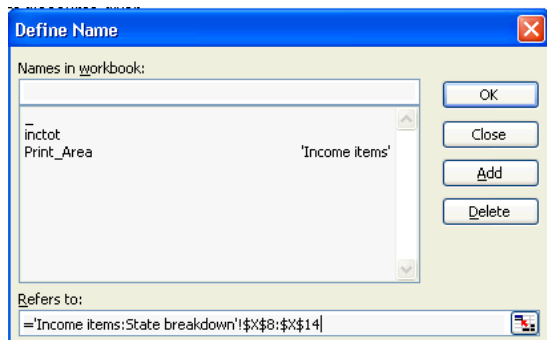


Diagram 3.16

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Additional to cell tagging, each data sheet should be tagged with an embedded ID and both data sheets and the Front of Form sheet should have an ETL-PIMS metadata ID.

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Pre-Despatch Checks

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PRE-DESPATCH CHECKS

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

Contents

- Introduction
- Ensure the cursor/focus is positioned correctly
- Functionality
- Printing
- Password protecting the workbook

Introduction

Immediately before 'despatch' (i.e. making the Excel form available to the providers), the following checks should be done or repeated.

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Ensure the cursor/focus is positioned correctly

For all Excel worksheets, the cursor or focus for data entry is identified by a darker border around the active cell. Ideally it should be positioned in the first data entry cell every time a worksheet is opened, but there is no way, without using tailored code, to control where the focus appears or defaults to on opening a sheet. Therefore, it appears where ever it was when the sheet was saved, which can be very disorientating for users.

The position of the first data entry cell varies, so the standard is to ensure the focus always appears in the top left corner of every worksheet by positioning it there on the final save before distribution. The following are instructions on how to do this:

1. Open the workbook;
2. Go to the first sheet and press the Control+Home keys (this should place the cursor in the top left cell);
3. Go to the next sheet (Control+PageDown or PageUp) and repeat Control+Home, until all sheets are set;
4. Finally, return to the first sheet (How to Use); and then
5. Save the Workbook and exit.

Example of where focus should be:

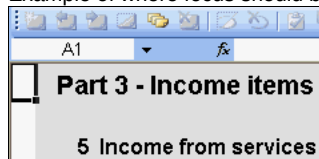


Diagram 4.1

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Functionality

Check totalling, where implemented, by entering a 1 in every cell contributing to total or sub-total to ensure that the displayed total equates to the 'sum of 'Qx,Qn' note by the total box. This applies particularly when slight changes have been made by moving cells rows to adjust the appearance of the instrument in the display or when an instrument or worksheet has been cloned.

Do a final 'tab-through' to pick up:

- any unlocked non-data entry cells; and
- data entry cells that have residual numbers or text in them left over from the construction and testing process.

The final checks should be made by the Subject Matter Area (SMA), because they will recognise totalling or other instrument areas far more quickly than the programmers who have constructed the instrument.

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Printing

A live print or print preview of the form should be viewed before despatch to ensure that when printed, the page-breaks are appropriate and the Excel form resembles the paper form as closely as practical. In particular, header information should be checked for correct dates, survey name etc. as these are not normally viewed and can become out of date.

For Excel forms it is sometimes necessary to take up more space than will print on an A4 page, in order to be uncluttered on the screen. It is more important for the screen view to have an ideal layout, than for printing to be minimised. In most cases, the forms are only printed to keep a hard copy on file once the form has been completed.

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Password protecting the workbook

Before sending the workbook to the respondent, the workbook should be password protected in order to keep the form intact and prevent cells from being unlocked, formats lost etc. All cells are defaulted to lock when the sheet is protected. Therefore data entry cells must be 'unlocked' in order to keep them editable.

- To unlock a cell choose <Format>, <Cells>, <Protection> and untick 'locked'.
- Once the data entry cells have all been unlocked, protect the sheet or entire workbook by going to <Tools>, <Protection> then <Protect Sheet> or <Protect Workbook>. "Structure" is selected by default, you need to type in a password. Note that there is no way to recover a password once added, so you need to use a standard password for this. Diagram 4.1 shows the protection dialogue box.

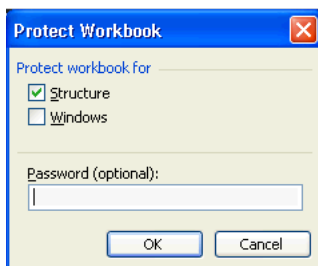


Diagram 4.2

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Multi-Unit Excel Form Specific Standards

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MULTI-UNIT EXCEL FORM SPECIFIC STANDARDS

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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- Definition
- General Excel standards
- Standard components
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Definition

These Excel forms have a spreadsheet-like layout where the questions and responding units form a matrix. There are two different types, those with a horizontal layout where the questions are positioned in the columns across the spreadsheet (Diagram 1), and those with a vertical layout where the questions are in rows down the spreadsheet (Diagram 2).

	Q1	Q2	Q3	..	QN
Unit 1					
Unit 2					
Unit 3					
:					
Unit X					

Diagram 1. Horizontal Multi-unit layout

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	Unit1	Unit2	Unit3	..	UnitN
Q1					
Q2					
Q3					
:					
QX					

Diagram 2. Vertical Multi-unit layout

These forms have particular application to surveys that require multiple responses, for different business units, on the same form. Each cell in the spreadsheet potentially contains the response for an individual business unit. The forms are also sometimes used where the respondent wants to report on a by unit basis (for example by product code), but the ABS is interested in the aggregate.

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General Excel standards

The general Excel standards for the use of colour, lines, fonts etc. still apply. For example, the answer space on the forms must be white, and all other parts shaded. Text should all be in Arial, except for office use only text, and of a suitable size to differentiate headings, questions and notes. Please refer to the relevant sections above for full details.

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Standard components

Multi-unit forms should be consistent with general Excel and all other electronic forms. That is, 'Front of Form', 'How to Use', 'General instructions' and 'How to Submit' pages must be included in separate sheets. Some of the details on these pages may need to be adapted. For example, if pop-up comment boxes are used, an instruction for accessing them may be added into the 'How to use' tab and details on how to complete the form, using tables, etc. may need to go into the 'General instructions' tab. Refer to 'Common Standards to all Electronic Forms' for more detail on standard components.

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Wording and language

The layout of Multi-Unit forms in rare cases prohibits the use of standard question wording and the provision of includes, excludes and notes on the same page. It is important that the main elements of the question are retained so that respondents can identify the question item correctly. For example, keeping key words such as 'employment' and 'income', which have widely perceived meaning, and not substituting words like 'number' or 'amount' or simply 'total'.

Standard question wording is tested to ensure that respondents understand the question and correctly respond. When using a summarised form without notes, includes and excludes, rigorous testing should be conducted to ensure the questions are still understood. If questions are being summarised or paraphrased, it is important to do this consistently across collections. That is, the Excel forms for similar collections which share standard question wording should be checked before embarking on the process of paraphrasing for a Multi-unit form. This is also relevant to other common questions used across different forms or surveys.

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Screen resolution

Conventional forms are designed to fit within the width of a maximised 800x600 window on a 15" monitor running at 24m colours. This does not mean that ABS forms are saved at 800x600 resolution, only that the form is made small enough to be fully visible when opened at a lower resolution. However, for most Multi-Unit forms, the width of the body of the form will extend beyond the full width of an 800x600 screen, requiring scrolling to view the entire form. It is more important for these forms that any subsections of the form appear together, i.e. questions won't be split up when scrolling.

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Locking or protecting cells

As with conventional Excel forms, any part of the sheet which is not a data entry point should be locked, to prevent inadvertent deletion of question text and headings. Unused parts of the spreadsheet should also be locked and hidden to prevent data entry outside the form and to avoid the respondent becoming lost.

To prevent the respondent from having to unnecessarily scroll up to view information in the column headings, or across to view row headings, these should be frozen. To freeze the column headings only, go to the column to the right of the last column (that is, the first column that will be hidden) and selecting the cell in the first row below the heading row. From the menu, choose <Window> then <Freeze Panes>. When the panes (rows and columns) are frozen an "Unfreeze" option becomes available in the "Window" menu which allows you to undo the freeze. To freeze the column headings and row headings select the cell in the row below the heading row and in the column next to the column containing the row headings then choose <Freeze Panes>.

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Layout

Ideally, questions should be in one row (or column where the questions are in rows);

- Notes can be positioned in the row above (or preceding column);

- Includes, excludes, response categories and instructions can be positioned in the row below (or column right)

Cell widths can be varied for fitting in shorter and longer questions, however this affects the cell widths for answer boxes which should be consistent for questions where the same type and magnitude of answer is expected. One way to achieve this is to use merged cells for the question, while the answer box is contained within one cell. For example, in Diagram 5, the question text runs over two merged rows, while the answer box is contained in one row. Using every second column allows each answer box to be separated rather than appearing as a table format (as pictured in Diagrams 3 and 4).

In cases where the includes and excludes are quite large, these may be given in a pop-up Excel comment which appears when the mouse is hovered over the cell, as pictured in Diagram 4.

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	Note • Acres ÷ 2.5 = Hectares. • Please report to one decimal place.			Note If the variety failed completely or all grapes were left on the vines, indicate the major intended use by writing '0' in the appropriate column below.		
Questions 1 and 2						
Area of vines harvested	Area of vines at harvest 2007			Grapes harvested in season 2007 for –		
	Bearing	Not yet bearing				
Planted or grafted on or after 16 November 2006 but before 16 November 2007		Planted or grafted on before 2006 harvest	Planted or grafted on after 2006 harvest	Winemaking or distillation	Drying (dried weight)	Table and other
Hectares	Hectares	Hectares	Hectares	Tonnes	Tonnes	Tonnes

Diagram 3 - This example shows a case where the questions are split into sub-questions, note that the unit of response is given for each.

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Note Collective agreements set pay and conditions for a group of employees through a negotiation process.		Note Awards are legally enforceable determinations of Federal and State industrial tribunals or authorities that set pay and conditions	
21. Was the main part of this employee's pay set by a collective agreement?		Including - Enterprise, workplace, industry, site or project collective agreements that set pay - Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBA) or Certified Agreements (CA) - Enterprise awards and consent awards - Unregistered or verbal collective agreements	
yes or no.			
If Yes ► Go to Q27		If Yes ► Go to Q25	If Yes ► Go to Q30

Diagram 4 - This example shows a case where there are categorical answers, and the Including items have been put into a comments box, as indicated by the red triangle in the corner. The comment is only visible when the mouse is covered over the cell.

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1 Was the job identified above occupied in the last pay period ending on or before Friday 16 November 2007?		Yes/No	Yes ☐ No ☐
2 Was the job occupied by the same employee in the last pay period ending on or before Friday 16 November 2007?		Yes/No	Yes ☐ No ☐
If not, specify the ID of the new employee in the job.			

Diagram 5 - This example shows the layout where the questions are in the rows, and the units in separate columns.

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Special features

The respondent should receive a separate PDF of the paper form, along with the Excel form for their reference, because some features on the form may be different and they may wish to refer to this more familiar format while responding. The inclusion of the pdf should be explained in the covering email, that is, that it has been included for reference purposes only.

Specific instructions for how to complete the form should be added to the 'general instructions' tab. For e.g. in the Vineyards survey respondents are instructed:

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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Introduction

Interactive Voice Response (IVR) is a computerised telephony system that has the ability to interact on a basic level with telephone users. A prerecorded voice lists a series of options and prompts. The user chooses their desired option by either pressing a number on a telephone keypad, or by speaking a simple answer that the system is programmed to recognise. IVR is commonly used by companies such as banks, airlines and cinemas, to deal with common or basic customer requests (e.g. requests for account balances, flight times, or movie sessions). IVR is also popular with tax authorities in the US, allowing simple tax returns to be filed by telephone (Electronic Commerce Best Practices, 2000).

There are two main types of IVR: Telephone Data Entry (TDE) and Automated Speech Recognition (ASR). These vary in terms of how the user inputs their response.

In a TDE system, the user is generally asked a question, and then provided with a series of options that correspond to the keys on a "dual-tone multi-frequency" (DTMF) telephone keypad (see Figure 1). Most telephones are limited to 12 keys, and therefore produce 12 signals that the system can recognise (0-9, * and #). The user responds to the questions by pressing the relevant key on the keypad; the corresponding tone then inputs the response to the system. TDE can also be used to enter letters as input (see paragraph 73); however, entering information this way can be tedious, so its use should be minimised. Telephone Data Entry is sometimes referred to as "Touchtone Data Entry", and when used in a survey data collection context, "Telephone Audio Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing (T-ACASI)".

1	2 ABC	3 DEF
4 GHI	5 JKL	6 MNO
7 PQRS	8 TUV	9 WXYZ
*	0	#

Figure 1 - Layout of a standard DTMF telephone keypad

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In an ASR system, the user responds to the system's options by saying a word (or words) that the system has been programmed to recognise. The system may repeat the user's responses so that the user can confirm or amend them (Schneider, Cantor, Heller & Brick, 2002). ASR is sometimes referred to as "Guided Speech IVR", "Natural Language IVR (NLIVR)", "Voice User Interface" (VUI) and "Voice Recognition Entry" (VRE).

Both TDE and ASR can be used in a single IVR system - this is known as a "multi-mode" application (Standards Australia, 2005). For example, the user may be given the option to either say "Help", or to press 0 for help. Allowing choice in the mode of input can be desirable; for example, users may feel more comfortable inputting private information such as passwords using the keypad rather than verbally, and keypad entry can be a useful alternative if the user has encountered difficulty or errors using the ASR system (Standards Australia, 2005). In addition, as TDE systems can only be used by users who have a DTMF telephone, providing an ASR alternative allows a wider range of users to use the system.

The potential use of IVR in survey data collection and related survey activities is being increasingly recognised. However, the literature on

this aspect of its use is limited, and to date, there has generally been more interest in TDE as a mode of data collection compared with ASR.

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This document

This document provides guidelines on designing an effective, user-friendly IVR system for survey-related activities at the ABS. Design standards are crucial, as most problems with IVR systems are the result of poor planning of menu structure and wording, rather than being due to technical failures (Dortmans & Angus, 2001). Systems that are not logical and intuitive will cause user frustration and a reluctance to use the system.

It is important that, from the respondent's perspective, the IVR system is as consistent as possible across ABS collections. This means ensuring factors like terminology, menu structure, voice, language, and error messages are implemented consistently (these factors are discussed below). A consistent, predictable system will lead to faster learning, greater productivity, fewer errors, and greater satisfaction (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003).

The focus of this document is on the system output that a user hears while using the IVR system, and system input considerations. Technical issues such as hardware and software requirements are out of the scope of this document.

These guidelines are based on international research and practice, and include advice from the Australian and New Zealand IVR design standards (Standards Australia, 2005; Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003). Note that at the time of finalising this document the Australian standards on ASR were still in draft form and may be subject to change. The standards are available online (see reference list for details).

The IVR standards that are currently available in the literature are generally intended for "traditional" IVR systems (i.e. those that provide a service to the user, such as providing information or routing them to an appropriate party). Not all of the recommendations in such standards are likely to be appropriate for IVRs for data collection; however, some standards are universally encouraged (Mundt, Searles, Perrine & Walter, 1997), and relevant guidelines have been included here.

These standards have been produced prior to the development of IVR systems at the ABS. The standards are likely to be updated after pilot testing to include more specific guidelines to ensure standard application of IVR across ABS collections that use this technology.

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User identification in inbound and outbound systems

A distinction that is made between types of IVR in a survey context is whether it is the user or the survey organisation who initiates the telephone call. In "inbound IVR", the user dials directly into the IVR system (after being recruited to the survey through some other means). In "outbound IVR", the user is contacted. Usually an interviewer makes the initial recruitment call, then switches the user to an automated system after asking some initial questions and providing instructions on using the system (Couper, Singer & Tourangeau, 2004). However, outbound calls may be made with no operator intervention; that is, a pre-recorded message may provide the information that would otherwise be provided by the interviewer. This latter type of outbound call may be applicable for pre-recorded Intensive Follow-Up (IFU).

Whether it is an inbound or outbound system, it is important that users are identified properly at the start of the call. Users of inbound systems are generally prompted at the start of the call to enter a unique reference number. In outbound calls, the interviewer may confirm the respondent's identity through standard interviewing questions, similar to those used in Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATIs). The "Introducing users to the system" section below contains more details on identifying users.

Users should not be required to identify themselves more than once in a call (Dortmans & Angus, 2001). This also applies when calls are transferred from one location to another (e.g. when being transferred from the IVR system to an operator; Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003). Repeated requests for the same information are extremely frustrating for users, and represent "the single biggest barrier to the perception of efficiency" of the system (Cohen, Giangola & Balogh, 2004, p. 206). Perceived inefficiency can lead to a greater number of hang-ups, longer call durations, decreased user satisfaction, and a reduced level of user attention (Cohen et al., 2004).

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Possible applications of IVR in the ABS

This section outlines the potential uses of IVR at the ABS. Much of this section is based on knowledge about how IVR has been used in international organisations, such as the ONS (Lewis, 2006). TDE has been used more commonly in survey organisations than ASR. It is unrealistic to use ASR to recognise unrestricted speech for survey data collection; however, a mixed TDE/ASR system that can recognise a limited vocabulary may be appropriate (Lewis, 2006).

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Directing queries

IVR can be used as the first point of contact for all callers, to filter and direct incoming calls from respondents, based on the option the respondent selects. The PCU currently uses a sophisticated telephony system which performs functions such as routing calls to interviewers (based on factors such as interviewer skill level), and providing recorded updates to respondents waiting for an interviewer. There are also particular "1800 freecall" telephone numbers for respondents in different surveys to ring for assistance. The phone number (which appears on the front page of the form) identifies the incoming caller as being part of a particular survey, and automatically routes them to an appropriate interviewer. This functionality could be incorporated into an IVR system, in which after the relevant survey has been identified by the phone number called, additional options for that particular survey are provided to the respondent (such as those options listed below).

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Requests for duplicate forms

For surveys where duplicate forms are not provided in the initial dispatch or as part of the reminder process, respondents can use the IVR system to request a duplicate form.

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Requests for extensions

Respondents who are unable to return their form by the due date, or who receive reminder letters after not returning their form on time, can

use the IVR system to request an extension to the due date. This option should be considered carefully, as in practice it may prove difficult to implement. There are several reasons for this, including:

- The rules that govern whether extensions are granted to respondents differ across surveys;
- Judgement is required as to whether an extension is warranted for an individual, based on their individual circumstances; and
- A large number of callers may decide to take the option of an extension if it is offered, even if they were initially calling for a different reason.

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Registering a nil response

Respondents who wish to register a nil response to a survey can do so via the IVR system, by ringing the freecall number, keying their reference number, and confirming that they wish to register a nil response. This option can be provided as a stand-alone option for surveys where a high number of nil responses is common (e.g. CapEx); that is, the option of submitting actual data via IVR may not need to be offered for these surveys.

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Data collection

Respondents can be offered the option to submit their survey data via IVR. Longitudinal surveys in which the same respondents participate on a regular basis, and which have a small number of simple data items, are ideal. Long, complex surveys with numerous explanatory notes and definitions are unsuitable. Attempting to administer a complex survey via IVR would place excessive cognitive demands on respondents, as they would have to remember not only each question, but the permitted responses, and associated explanatory notes, definitions etc. This could lead to errors, frustration, and the provision of poor quality data. As a general "rule of thumb", an IVR transaction should be able to be completed in ten minutes or less (Electronic Commerce Best Practices, 2000).

Submitting data via IVR should never be mandatory; the paper form should always be provided as an alternative, as there will always be some respondents who do not want to submit data via IVR (Lewis, 2006). Given the Multi Modal Data Collection (MMDC) and Standard Business Reporting (SBR) projects, the ABS may end up offering a range of reporting options (e.g. paper, email, fax, IVR, CATI), and let respondents choose which mode they would prefer for a particular collection.

An option is to allow automatic validation of data against previous data, whereby if the respondent provides data that differs greatly from that previously provided, the system asks them to explain this via a recorded message. The message can be played back by survey processing staff at a later time, reducing the need for staff to follow-up respondents with queries about their data. However, to avoid introducing a modal bias, this should only be provided as an option if an interviewer or editor would query the respondent later anyway.

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User requirements

Depending on which of the above activities the IVR system is being used for, some or all of the following should be dispatched to respondents:

- a paper form or telephone reporting card (if survey data is to be collected)
- standard instructions on completing the form
- information about the option to use IVR
- instructions on how to use the IVR system
- the freecall telephone number to ring to access the system
- the respondent's unique reference number (see section below for more details on reference numbers)
- details of the data required

Even if respondents are provided with written instructions, they may not read them before attempting to use the system. It is therefore important that the system is self-explanatory, so that an inexperienced user can get all the help they may require during the call. Related to this, an option is to provide new IVR respondents with a practice ID number that allows them to try out the system before providing real data (Clayton & Winter, 1992).

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Introducing users to the system

The introductory information that users hear when accessing the system is important, as it helps set their expectations for the system (Schneider et al., 2002). It is important to welcome the user to the system and put them at ease through clear instructions. The introduction should explain the purpose of the call; approximately how long it will take; and how to obtain further information or help.

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User identification

Users of inbound IVR systems should be provided with a unique reference number in the survey material they receive (see "User requirements" section above). They should use this number to identify themselves when they call the IVR system. Stakeholder discussion is required to determine an appropriate method of allocating unique reference numbers. One option may be to identify each respondent with a number that is a combination of their unit ID and their telephone number. However, if a respondent is calling about more than one survey, this method may not work, so discussion is required to determine an appropriate solution for uniquely identifying respondents.

As mentioned above, it is important not to ask the user to provide the same information more than once in a call; therefore, once they have identified themselves, they should not be required to do this again within the IVR session.

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Explaining the technology

While the recorded voice should be welcoming, you should make it clear to users that they are interacting with a computer and not a human (Noonan, 2006; Harris, 2005). Failing to do so will lead to "... assumptions of capabilities beyond what the system can fulfil (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 210). This is particularly important for ASR systems, where the belief that a human is on the other end of the phone may lead to requests that are too long and complicated for the system to recognise.

Whether or not to use personalising language, such as the first person, is not clear-cut in the literature (e.g. Schumacher, Hardzinski & Schwartz, 1995; Harris, 2005), and will depend in part on the type of IVR system being implemented. For example, a conversational approach, where personalising language is used freely, may be suited to IVR systems that provide information on restaurants, social events etc. A non-personalising approach, in which terms like "I", "me" etc. are avoided, may be more appropriate for ABS IVR systems. Non-personalising language may also be more effective when the survey questions are of a sensitive nature (Tourangeau, Couper & Steiger, 2003).

Examples of personalising vs non-personalising language:

Personalising: "Please tell me your reference number"

Non-personalising: "Please say your reference number".

Personalising: "I will now read out a list of five possible responses"

Non-personalising: "Please listen to the following list of five possible responses"

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Instructions for navigating and obtaining help should be explained at the beginning of the call (e.g. "To access further information at any time, say "Help", or press 1"). These options should be available throughout the entire call, and should always be accessible using the same command (Noonan, 2006). See the "Help" section below for more detailed information on help in IVR systems.

It is important that the user has the option at all times to speak to an operator (during normal business hours), and that this is made clear at the start of the call. If they are calling outside normal business hours, speaking to an operator may not be possible; again, this should be made clear up front. In this case, they should be given the option to leave a message and have someone call them back during business hours. (In the future, respondents may also be able to leave an email address for an email response).

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Example introductions

The type of introduction that is appropriate will depend on whether it is an inbound or outbound call.

Example introduction for inbound system

Hello. Welcome to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' automated telephone system.

Your x-digit reference number is located at the top right hand side of the letter you received. At the tone, please enter your reference number, using the numbers on your telephone keypad. [Tone]

Thank you.

** Our hours of business are 9-5 EST. During these hours, you may speak to an ABS staff member at any time by pressing zero.

Outside these hours you may leave a message by pressing zero.

The letter you received contains information on how to use the system, such as how to get help.

To hear this information, press 1. To skip this step and begin entering data, press 2.

[If 1 pressed]

To access help at any time during the call, please press 1.

To repeat the current question, press star.

To correct an entry you have made, press hash.

To start the system over again, press 2.

To speak to an ABS staff member, press zero.

To submit your data and end the call, press 3 or simply hang up.

[If 2 pressed]

Begin survey questions

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Example introduction for outbound system

Interviewer:

Hello, this is XX from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. I'm calling about the XX Survey. Could I speak to [name] please?

[If a survey form or telephone reporting card was received]: Check for survey ID

[If no survey form or telephone reporting card was received]: Check for ABN

As explained in the letter you received, data for this survey can now be reported via our automated telephone system. A recorded voice will ask the questions, which you can respond to by pressing the relevant numbers on your telephone keypad. There are only two data items to report [briefly describe data items], and the call should only take about two minutes.

If you need assistance at any time during the call, press 1.

Do you have any questions before I transfer you to the system?

[Revert to ** in inbound example above]

Compared to other interviewing techniques, it is particularly easy for users to abandon IVR interviews prematurely, as they can simply hang up the phone without risking offending anyone. Leaving the system before completing the interview is known as 'break-off', and can be a particular problem for outbound systems, where the user may leave the system after the interviewer switches them to the IVR system (Couper et al., 2004). The system should be set up so if the user ends the call before completing the session, all data provided up to that point is saved (see paragraph 82). Having the interviewer ask a few basic questions (e.g. demographic information such as age and educational attainment, for household surveys) before switching the user may reduce the number of break-offs (Tourangeau et al., 2003).

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The IVR "voice"

Overview

Deciding on the voice that users will hear when they use the IVR system is one of the most important decisions to make when designing the system (Noonan, 2006; Harris, 2005). The voice is one of the most easily identifiable features of the system, and voice characteristics can have a great impact on users' experience of the system. The voice that is appropriate depends on the type of application it is and what organisation it represents; testing beforehand should uncover what voice users prefer (Harris, 2005). It is important that whatever type of voice is used, for consistency, the same voice is used throughout the entire IVR system (Dortmans & Angus 2001; but see Harris, 2005). This section contains some factors to consider when choosing an appropriate voice.

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Digitised or synthesised

IVR voices can be either "digitised" or "synthesised". A digitised voice is a recording of a live human voice, which is converted to a digital format. Depending on factors such as the quality of the recording devices used, the final voice may sound more or less like the original. Most IVR applications use digitised speech. A synthesised voice is computer-generated, usually using a text-to-speech (TTS) system (Couper et al., 2004). Using real voices, tiny segments of speech are pre-recorded, and the segments are later concatenated into sequences and played to the user (Cohen et al., 2004). Synthesised speech is becoming more popular due to its flexibility and cost-saving potential (Couper et al., 2004). It is particularly useful and economical when the information presented to users is lengthy or frequently updated (i.e. where pre-recording is too expensive) (Standards Australia, 2005).

Synthesised speech varies in how "human-like" or "machine-like" it sounds; however, newer synthesised systems are sounding more natural and less mechanical (Couper, 2002). Users tend to prefer the more realistic sound of digitised speech (Harris, 2005; Couper, 2004), and non-native speakers and elderly users in particular can find synthesised output difficult to comprehend (Cohen et al., 2004). However, comprehension of synthesised speech "... may improve with exposure to and experience with the system" (Phipps & Tupek, 1991, p. 5), so this type of speech may be appropriate for repeat users of the system.

Couper et al. (2004) investigated whether the "humanness" of the voice had an effect on users' reporting of sensitive information. The voice was either a real human voice, a human-sounding synthesised voice, or a machine-sounding synthesised voice. They crossed this by gender of voice. They found that the voice had little effect on factors including the break-off rate, responses to sensitive questions, and respondents' ratings of the degree to which the interaction was like participating in an "ordinary conversation".

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Gender

There is much discussion in the literature about the effect that voice gender has on listeners' impressions; however, there has been little examination of the effect of voice gender for IVR systems.

Social psychological research about the effect that the gender of a voice has on people's perceptions of a speaker has suggested that males are often rated higher on influence, persuasiveness, and authority, while female voices are rated as more friendly, pleasant and helpful (e.g. Eagly, 1983; Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003). Harris (2005) argues that the gender of the IVR voice, whether digital or synthesised, can trigger these stereotypes. Similarly, Cohen et al. (2004) claim that "... we humans cannot help inferring personality traits and social information from the voices we hear, even if we encounter them as brief, recorded samples" (p. 75).

However, not all studies have found gender to have a significant effect on perceptions, and in a controlled experiment examining the effect of the IVR voice, Couper et al. (2004) found that voice gender did not affect users' perceptions of a range of factors.

Despite the scarcity of studies investigating the effect of voice gender in IVR systems, most IVR systems use female voices (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003; Couper et al., 2004). Most systems are optimised for strong, clear voices that are of an average pitch (not too high or too low); therefore a contralto female voice is suitable (Noonan, 2006). Furthermore, female modulation is often received more easily by people using hearing-aids (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003). In contrast, Noonan (2006) claims that most of the better synthetic speech currently available is male, because the vocal characteristics of the male voice are less complex and therefore easier to synthesise (Noonan, 2006).

Voice gender should be considered when designing the IVR system, and users' preference for different voices should be tested.

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Tone

The tone of the speaker's voice should not sound bored or dull (Noonan, 2006). Rather, it should be expressive, with voice inflection indicating things such as when a list of options is complete (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003). Words should be clearly enunciated, particularly those that sound similar (e.g. "five" and "nine", "F" and "S") (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003). Radio announcers and radio "actors" are often used as IVR speakers, as they have good control over their voices and are able to emote effectively (Harris, 2005; Withers, 2001). "Warm", "friendly", "agreeable", and "assertive" are some of the adjectives that researchers have suggested as being important for IVR voices (Schneider et al., 2002).

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IVR menus

Overview

The IVR systems that most people are familiar with are structured hierarchically, and contain one or more "menus". A menu contains a set of options or prompts, each describing an available choice, and the action that is required to make that choice (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003). An example of a prompt is "To update your contact details, press 1". (Prompts are described in more detail in the "Prompts and questions" section below).

Menus may be prefaced with a title or brief explanation before the options are read out (e.g. "Main menu"). When the user makes a selection, the system offers another menu, until the system reaches the item or action that the user wants. An example of a simple IVR structure for a typical system that provides a service to the caller is shown below. Text in bold represents the options that are provided in the first level menu (i.e. the "main menu"). Lower level menu options appear beneath the main menu items, with items of the same menu level having the same size indent (the greater the indent, the lower the menu level of the item).

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Example of a basic structure for a typical IVR system

```
Hello, welcome to Cinema Australia's automated telephone service.  
For session times, press 1  
If you know the name of the film you would like to see, press 1  
    Please say the name of the film now  
    Please say the day of the week that you would like to see the film  
        (session times are listed)  
To find out which films are playing on a particular date, press 2  
    Please say the day of the week that you would like to see the film  
        (films and session times are listed)  
To hear a list of films that are currently showing, press 3  
    To skip to the next film, press 1.  
    To hear further details about the film, press 2.  
    To go to the main menu, press 3.
```

To buy tickets, press 2

Please say the name of the film now
 Please say the session day and time
 Please say the number of tickets you would like to buy
 Please enter your credit card details
 etc.

To hear a film review, press 3

If you know the name of the film you would like to hear reviewed, press 1
 Please say the name of the film now
(Review is played)
 To hear a list of films that are currently showing, press 2
 To skip to the next film, press 1
 When you hear the name of the film you're interested in, press 2 and a review will be played

To hear a list of our current prices, press 4

(Current prices are listed)

To speak to an operator, press 0

(Caller is transferred to an operator)

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Users may be allowed to make a selection from a menu without having to listen to all of the options (Noonan, 2006). This way, frequent users can override the menu and go straight to their preferred option quickly. This is known as "key-ahead" (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003). As respondents in e.g. monthly IVR surveys will become very familiar with the options provided, allowing key-ahead may be appropriate in some instances.

Allowing users to interrupt some types of system output (such as the current message being played) with valid input (including requests for help) is known as "interrupt capability" for TDE systems (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003) or "barge-in" for ASR systems. For most IVR systems, non-interruptible messages should be only those messages that are considered essential for all users to hear in full. However, IVR systems for survey data collection generally do not enable interrupt capability or barge-in, since users should hear each question in its entirety (Schneider et al., 2002). Another reason to be careful with allowing barge-in for ASR systems is that extraneous noise (e.g. coughing, throat clearing) may lead to inappropriate interruption if the system is too sensitive (Standards Australia, 2005).

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Developing a menu structure

IVR systems that are used for "form filling" generally do not contain menus that users would be recognise as such. Rather than the user navigating their way through the interface through their responses to prompts, the system directs them through the application, asking them a series of questions as if they were completing a form (Cohen et al., 2004; Standards Australia, 2005).

However, it is still important in the early stages of developing the IVR system to specify how the system will be structured. This includes determining how user errors will be handled (see the "Errors" section below). The overview of the structure could take the form of a list, as in the example above, or be displayed in a flow chart that shows all possible paths of the system.

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Number of items

A mistake that many IVR designers make is to try to do too much. The end result is often a menu system with many levels and many choices at each level. It is important to restrict the number of menu levels, and the number of choices at each level (Dortmans & Angus, 2001). The ideal number of menu items specified in the literature ranges from about 3 to 7. Noonan (2006) advises including 3 to 5 items in a menu, as this is all that can be held in the short-term memory of most users. Gerber (2000) claims that people will only wait through 7 menu items, before they go to the operator. Dortmans and Angus (2001) suggest that a 4 by 4 menu, i.e. 4 main items, each which have 4 or less options, is plenty for most applications. The Australian standard (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003) recommends limiting menus to 4 options. Note that this suggested maximum does not include the recommended "universal" options (see "Help" section below). Schumacher et al. (1995) suggest that if it is not possible to limit the number of options to 4 or less, the less frequently chosen options can be put in a fifth general category, e.g. "For more options, press 5".

At each level of the menu, where there are several options, it is useful to tell users how many choices they have before telling them what the choices are. For example, "You now have three choices. To update your contact details, press 1..." This lets users know what is coming up, encourages them to listen to the entire menu before making a selection, and reduces the likelihood of users selecting the wrong response (Dortmans & Angus, 2001; Harris, 2005, Schumacher et al., 1995).

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Order of items

When a person processes information that is presented on paper or a computer screen, they can look at any part of the information displayed as much or as little as they choose. For example, when you read a restaurant menu, you are able to "...take in all the items at a glance, search through them, look back at ones you've forgotten, skip over several to look at the fourth one in the list, and so on..." (Harris, 2005, p. 215). However, since the information presented in a typical IVR system is serial - only one word can be heard at a time - the order that material is presented is crucial (Noonan, 2006).

Menu options should be in ascending numerical order (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003), with the most important or commonly selected items (as identified in pre-testing) presented at the beginning of each menu. This means that most users will not have to listen to the entire list before making their selection (Noonan, 2006).

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Prompts and questions

General guidelines

Prompts, questions and instructions should be clear, concise, and unambiguous (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003). They should be kept as brief as possible, without sounding terse and without sacrificing clarity (Noonan, 2006; Cohen et al., 2004). Tone and wording should encourage users to remedy situations when they get lost, make errors, or are not responding quickly enough, without seeming to chastise them (Noonan, 2006).

Simple language and terms should be used; avoid jargon or technical terms that users may not be familiar with (Noonan, 2006). For example, in the case of an error occurring, the second error message below is a more effective, jargon-free message than the first

message:
"An error has been generated. Returning to Main" (*jargon*).

"Sorry, there was a technical problem, so we'll have to go back to the main menu" (*jargon-free*).

Always announce the function first, followed by the response required to activate it (Noonan, 2006), e.g. "To transfer to an operator, press 0". Stating the required response first ("Press 0 to transfer to an operator") will lead some users to jump in early and enter a response before the instruction is completed (Dortmans & Angus, 2001). Also, it is less taxing on users' memory if the information they need to remember is the last thing they hear (Cohen et al., 2004).

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Each prompt should include some prominent key words. The most significant key word should appear early in the sentence, but not as the first word (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003).

The use of polite terms such as "please", "sorry", "thank you", and "goodbye" should be considered carefully - overuse of these terms can sound tedious, while underuse can sound terse. For example, in a list of menu options, it is unnecessary to include "please" in each one ("For sales, please press 1", "For shipping, please press 2"...). However, the use of "please" at the start of a prompt (e.g. "Please enter your account number") helps to positively dispose the user to the system (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003). It is recommended that "sorry" is included at the beginning of error messages, e.g. "Sorry, that term was not recognised by the system" (see paragraphs 83-89 for more on errors). This is not to give the user the false impression that they are interacting with a human, but to "... facilitate comprehension, thereby reducing cognitive load..." (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 147).

Prompts should be moderately paced. There should be a short pause between menu items, and a slightly longer pause between different menus. Avoid long silences, as this can cause confusion (Noonan, 2006).

The vocabulary that is used should be consistent throughout the system, to prevent confusion, and to help users learn what to expect. The table below shows the preferred terminology for common terms used in TDE output, as recommended by Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand (2003). Note that the first time users are prompted to enter the * or # keys, it is a good idea to tell them where the keys are located, e.g. "The hash key is located on the lower right of the keypad" (Schumacher et al., 1995).

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Table 1: Common terminology for output used in TDE systems - preferred and non-preferred terms (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003)

Description of item	Preferred term	Examples of non-preferred terms
# key	Hash	Pound, square, number sign
* key	Star	Asterisk, aster
0 key	Zero	Nought, oh
Ending a call	End, disconnect	Terminate
Ending or exiting the system	End, leave, exit	Disconnect, terminate
Entering DTMF data (e.g. a password, telephone number)	Enter	Dial, key-in, type
Inputting commands and menu choices	Press	Dial, key, push, touch
User personal code	Password, Personal Identification Code (PIC), ID code, Access code*	Security code
When spoken input is expected	Say (when responding to a prompt), Record (when a message is being recorded)	Speak
DTMF	Touchtone, tone	Push button, DTMF

* The standards do not explicitly advise for or against using the term "Personal Identification Number (PIN)". Basically, because of the strong association of PINs with financial transaction using an ATM, financial institutions are sensitive about the use of PIN in any situation other than in association with a financial transaction card. Financial institutions therefore avoid using the term PIN in IVR systems. The use of the term PIN in non-financial organisations' IVR systems is unlikely to be problematic; however, consistency across IVR systems is preferred.

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Wording of survey questions

When converting an existing self-administered survey to IVR, many standard ABS economic questions will need to be rephrased, as they are not worded as "questions" as such. They are really just titles designed to match sections in our respondents' accounts e.g. "Interest income". When converting such questions into IVR, these types of items need to be reworded to be actual questions, e.g. "What was this business's interest income for the period?". Simple questions with only one or two simple short notes may be appropriate for IVR; however, the notes must be incorporated into the question itself. For example:

"What was the total gross income of this business during the financial period?"
with the separate explanation:

Excluding

- Extraordinary items
- Goods and Services Tax (GST)

becomes the IVR question:

"What was the total gross income of this business during the financial period, excluding extraordinary income items and GST?"

Measurement units, which usually appear to the side of the response box in ABS paper forms, must also be incorporated into the question, e.g. "How long *in years*..." or "What was your business's income... *in thousands of dollars*".

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Questions that require the respondent to select one or more options from a list will need to be reworded so that each option is asked about separately, requiring a yes or no answer. This is because reading out even a short list over the phone for the respondent to choose from is prone to bias due to the cognitive difficulty of remembering all the items while making a decision. For example:

"Did this business use any of the following business practices during the year ended 30 June 2007?"

- Written strategic or business plans
- Budget forecasts
- Formal networking with other businesses
- Comparison of performance with other business
- Export market plans
- None of the above

becomes the IVR questions:

"Did your business use written strategic or business plans during the financial year?" (yes/no)

"Did your business use budget forecasts during the financial year?" (yes/no)

etc.

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In interviewer-administered surveys, once it is clear that the respondent understands the intent of the question, the interviewer often omits the stem (in the example above, "Did your business use..." is the stem). However, this may lead to respondent confusion in IVR; therefore, the entire question must be recited each time. This, combined with the fact that it is important that respondents hear each question in its entirety, can lead to the questions sounding repetitive, artificial and regimented (Schneider et al., 2002). Therefore, this type of questioning should be limited to a small number of items.

As with all ABS business surveys, respondents must be asked if they have any comments at the end of the survey. An adapted version of the paper form question is recommended:

"If you would like to make any comments about the information you have provided during this call, or about the automated interview process, please press 1 (or say yes) now".

[If yes] - "Please provide your comments now".

Similarly, collecting "Time taken" is mandatory for IVR surveys. The time for the call itself should be automatically recorded by the instrument so there is no need to ask the respondent this. However, for a full picture of the provider load and better comparison with paper form equivalents, it is important to ask about any other time the provider may have spent on the survey. The recommended wording is:

"Have you or any other employees spent any time on this survey, apart from this interview?" (No/Yes)

[If yes] "Please estimate how much time was spent, including reading"

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Answer options

TDE systems

While the majority of this chapter has focussed on recommendations for system output, this section will briefly cover guidelines related to the input that users of IVR should use. This information is from the Australian Standards (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003; Standards Australia, 2005). Anyone seeking more detailed information should refer to the standards.

The # key should be used as an input field delimiter to enter variable-length input (e.g. passwords, phone numbers) and move to the next step. The # should not be required to terminate fixed-length data input (e.g. "For sales, press 1"), however, if the user does press # in this situation, the system should ignore the delimiter it and not treat it as an error.

The * key should generally be used to either stop the current action, and go back one or more steps in the menu; or (if the user has commenced entering data), to disregard the data already entered and allow them to re-enter it.

For prompts that request a "Yes" or "No" response, 1=Yes and No=2.

Alpha characters can be entered using a keypad, using a similar method that is used to compose an SMS message on a mobile phone. The key that the letter appears on is pressed as many times as the position of the letter on the key, e.g. to enter the letter "B", the 2 key would be pressed twice (see Figure 1). This is not an ideal input method for long strings, and should be limited to short strings of characters. Furthermore, not every user will have a keypad with alpha layout, and some may have keypads that have alpha layout differing from that shown in Figure 1. Harris (2005) suggests that alpha entry can be used as a backup option for ASR systems, if the system repeatedly does not recognise what the user is saying.

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ASR systems

A selection of preferred terminology for common actions from the draft Australian standards for ASR (Standards Australia, 2005) is shown in Table 2. As the draft Australian standards may change, the guidelines should be interpreted with care. The preferred terminology refers to both user input and system output; that is, terminology used by the system, and user responses that the system should recognise.

Users should be instructed which terms are acceptable, e.g. "Please say 'yes' or 'no'". This is important for numerical values, e.g. "If your employment is four hundred and twelve, say 'four one two'" (Clayton & Winter, 1992).

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Table 2: Preferred terminology for ASR systems (Standards Australia, 2005)

Action	Recommended terminology
For reading prompt again	Repeat, say that again, pardon, sorry
For help	Help, instructions, user tips
For transferring to a human operator	Operator, agent, consultant
For going to the top of the main menu	Main menu, start, go to start, home
For listing commands/functions	Options
For terminating the service	Goodbye, bye, end, exit, quit, hang up
For going back to previous menu	Previous menu, go back
Cancel last action	Cancel
Discard last entry	Clear entry, clear input
End of input	Input complete, complete, done, finished
To stop current operation	Stop
For saying digit 0	Zero, oh
For 100-999	One hundred, one hundred and one, one hundred and two etc., or a hundred, a hundred and one...
1,000	One thousand, a thousand
1,000,000	One million, a million
Time of day between 12.00am and 11.59am	<time> am <time> o'clock <time> in the morning
Time of day between 12.00pm and 11.59pm	<time> pm <time> o'clock <time> in the evening, at night, in the afternoon
12.00pm	Twelve midday, midday, twelve noon, noon
12.00am	Twelve midnight, midnight
Date	<day of the week>, the <ordinal> of <month>, <year>, e.g. Monday, the twenty third of July, two thousand and seven

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Feedback and verification

It is important to provide the user with feedback each time they provide input to the system, so that they know their input has been received (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003). A common type of feedback is to present the next set of options immediately after the user has responded to the previous set. Another type is to play a short announcement (e.g. "Please wait while we access your account details"), or music, during any waiting periods, so that the user knows that their request is being processed. Note that radio should not be used to provide music, as the content cannot be guaranteed.

Users should have the opportunity to verify the data they provide. After they have entered the information, the system should repeat it back to them and allow them to confirm or amend it (e.g. E.g. "You entered 12345678. If correct, press 1 now. If incorrect, press 2"). This can help reduce errors. However, verification of every answer is unnecessary and tedious for users, and will increase the length of the interview, especially if there are more than a few data items. Requiring verification of selected menu choices (e.g. "You selected the Personal Details menu. If correct, press 1 now. If incorrect, press 2") is unnecessary and will frustrate users.

When confirming numeric information that the user has entered, the Australian Standards recommend that when a string of more than 4 digits is being read back by the system, the digits should be broken into logical groups of no more than 4 digits (e.g. the receipt number 12345678 would be read as "1234" (slight pause), then "5678". The dollar amount \$152.56 should be read back as "one hundred and fifty two dollars and fifty six cents". The date 25.4.93 should be read as "twenty-fifth of April, nineteen ninety-three" (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003).

When the system requires data in a particular format, having the system read back the information provided in the format requested can alert respondents to data entry errors. For example, if a respondent mistakenly enters the figure \$123,456 in whole dollars (i.e. 123456) rather than thousands of dollars (i.e. 123), having the system say "You reported 123 million, 456 thousand dollars" alerts the respondent to their error, and allows them to re-enter the correct response.

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Help

Users should be informed as early as possible in the call how to access help, and context-specific help information should be easily accessible at all times. Help information can be used to: repeat menus or prompts; describe how to perform a task; explain how to correct an error; describe menu choices in more detail; and explain generic system commands (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003).

Users who encounter technical difficulties, or cannot find the information they require, should always have the option to speak to a real person (within normal business hours), and instructions for doing so should be made clear. However, some users prefer not to interact with a human when using IVR systems (Noonan, 2006). This may be for a variety of reasons, e.g. they may not want to wait for an operator to become available, or they might prefer to attempt to remedy the problem on their own at a later time. You should therefore always notify the user when they are being transferred to an operator, so that they can make the choice to continue or discontinue the call.

In their discussion of ASR, Cohen et al. (2004) recommend the following six "universal", or generic commands that are available at all times regardless of where the user is in the system. These commands are designed to allow users to recover from problems and to receive context-specific help. The same universal commands are relevant for a TDE system. For example, * could be used to go back one or more steps in the menu, and 0 could be used to transfer to an operator (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003). Whichever keys or words are used to carry out the commands, they should be consistent throughout the application.

- Help: Provide help or additional instructions about the current state of the application
- Repeat: Repeat the most recently played prompt
- Main menu / start over: Return to the beginning of the application
- Go back: Go back up to the previous step
- Operator: Transfer to an operator
- Goodbye: Allow the user to say "Goodbye" and respond appropriately so that they are comfortable hanging up. If the user simply hangs up, the data they have provided should still be saved. However, users tend to be more comfortable saying goodbye or pressing a key to end the call, rather than just hanging up, due to the perception that simply hanging up might cause their data to be lost.

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Errors

Errors may occur in an IVR system when the user keys in an invalid response to a prompt (e.g. entering 9 digits for their password instead of the required 10). ASR systems are particularly prone to recognition errors caused by factors such as the following (from Standards Australia, 2005 and Harris, 2005):

- The user's speech not being recognised as being part of the system's vocabulary
- Environmental noise
- Coughing / throat clearing
- Long pauses in the user's speech
- The user beginning to speak too early, before recognition has started
- The user continuing to speak after recognition has finished
- The system "hearing" a word or phrase differently than what the user has spoken (e.g. "five" instead of "nine").

Errors can cause frustration and confusion, and can be indications that the user requires help. It is important to ensure that users are not left unsure about what to do next, or unable to extract themselves from an erroneous response (Noonan, 2006). Therefore, error handling must be carefully considered when designing the system to ensure that users can move forward from errors with minimal frustration (Standards Australia, 2005).

If a user enters invalid data, the message they receive should be brief, simple, and polite (Standards Australia, 2005), and clearly inform them what they should do to progress. Words such as "error", "wrong", and "invalid" should be avoided, as they may make the user feel foolish, which may reduce their desire to use the system.

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If the user says a term that is not recognised in an ASR system, Harris (2005) says that the follow-up prompt should include an apology, explain that it does not understand, and tell the user what sort of response is expected, e.g. "Sorry, that term was not recognised. You can say [list valid response options]". For a TDE system, a prompt might be "You have entered an incorrect account number - please enter again" (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003). If a user is encountering difficulties using ASR in a multi-mode IVR system, the option to use their keypad to enter their response should be mentioned in the message, e.g. "Please say the number again, or enter it using your telephone keypad" (Standards Australia, 2005).

If the user again enters an invalid response, the next prompt should be different, and more detailed, than the first. Having the system repeatedly provide the same error message in response to a repeated error is unhelpful and can be extremely irritating for users (Harris, 2005). The technique of providing increasingly detailed information in response to consecutive errors is known as the "escalating detail" strategy (Cohen et al., 2004). However, Cohen et al. (2004) note this method can be frustrating for users who know what to say to the ASR system, and just need another chance to enter their response. This may be the case for frequent users of the system. In this case, a more appropriate error handling technique can be for the system to reply with a brief prompt such as "I'm sorry?" or "What was that?" (known as the "rapid reprompt" approach). If another error occurs after this, the system can then revert to the strategy of providing more detailed instructions, as shown in Table 3.

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Table 3: Example of "escalating detail" versus "rapid reprompt" methods of dealing with errors (from Cohen et al., 2004)

Event	Escalating detail	Rapid reprompt
Initial prompt	What is your account number?	What is your account number?
First error	Sorry, I didn't understand. Please say your 10-digit account number.	I'm sorry?
Second error	Sorry, I still didn't understand. Your 10-digit account number appears on your monthly statement at the top right corner. Please say your account number now, or for more information, say "Help".	Sorry, I didn't understand. Please say your 10-digit account number.
Third error	Sorry, I still didn't understand. Please key in your account number, or say "I don't know", and I'll connect you to someone who can help you.	Sorry, I still didn't understand. Your 10-digit account number appears on your monthly statement at the top right corner. Please say your account number now, or for more information, say "Help".

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In considering error handling, you need to determine the maximum number of consecutive errors that will be allowed before the system takes other action, e.g. transferring the user to an operator (Cohen et al., 2004). A typical number is 3: after 2 or 3 consecutive errors, it is unlikely that the user will recover on their own, and break-off rates are high after a few recognition errors. The Australian Standards suggest that the system should do one of the following, depending on the number of repeated errors or help requests recorded (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003):

- request alternative data input;
- offer the user a choice between continuing the call or ending it;
- play a transfer message and transfer the user to an operator; or
- play a closing message and disconnect the user. This is usually done once the user exceeds a predetermined error limit (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003). The closing message should include an explanation of the problem that caused the error, suggestions for possible resolution of the problem (where appropriate), and a polite termination.

If there is a problem with the system that means that the user cannot carry out their desired action, they should be played a message informing them of the problem, and what alternatives they have (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003).

Example

"The system is currently experiencing technical difficulties. Please stay on the line, and you will be transferred to an operator. Otherwise, please try the system again later".

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Time-outs

"A time-out is a change in the state of the system in response to a period of no detected user input" (Schumacher et al., 1995, p. 260). Time-out errors can occur in both TDE and ASR systems, when the user does not provide a response to a prompt in the time allowed by the system. The time-out period is the time the system waits for data input to start in response to a prompt, before continuing to the next prompt.

The appropriate time-out for TDE systems in the literature varies, ranging from as little as 3 seconds (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand, 2003 - see Table 4), to 10-15 seconds (Dortmans & Angus, 2001), depending on the task being carried out. Note that these times may be extended after the first time-out is triggered.

The time-out for ASR systems is generally less than for TDE, as submitting a response verbally usually takes less time than entering a response using a keypad. For ASR, the time-out is usually about 2 seconds, ranging from around 1.5-3 seconds (Harris, 2005). Harris (2005) points out that "three seconds is a long time in a conversation, especially over the phone..." (p. 369), but acknowledges that some tasks may require a longer time-out.

When considering appropriate time-out values, you should take into account the task being performed, as well as the speaking speeds and response times of all users (including those with a disability). Questions that require a short answer will require a shorter time-out than questions requiring a longer answer, or an answer that requires the user to look up information (Standards Australia, 2005). Also, consider giving a longer time-out for the first few questions, and for questions that require a long string of digits to be entered (Phipps & Tupek, 1991).

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Table 4: TDE time-out values suggested by Standards Australia

Circumstance	Time-out value (seconds)
Simple task, such as making a selection from a basic menu (e.g. "To update your contact details, press 1")	3-8
Data input task involving looking up information prior to entry (such as retrieving an account code or credit card number)	
- Entry of initial digit	>10
- Entry of subsequent digits	3-8

If a user does not enter a response in the time expected, the system should repeat the current message or menu. If a second consecutive time-out is made, a rephrased, or more detailed explanation of the required input should be provided. If another consecutive time-out is made, one of the steps in paragraph 88 should be taken. Because silence may indicate that the user is not sure what to say, the rapid reprompt strategy may not be as effective for time-outs as it is for recognition errors (Cohen et al., 2004).

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Computer Assisted Interviewing (CAI) Interface Design Standards

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Computer Assisted Interviewing (CAI) Interface Design Standards

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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Introduction

These Computer Assisted Interviewing (CAI) standards are intended to guide the development of templates and instruments for (a) data collection for business and household surveys, and (b) instruments for telephone intensive follow-up (IFU) for business surveys. For ABS business surveys, Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) is commonly used, while for household surveys, Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) is most prevalent. In this document, the term "CAI" covers both CATI and CAPI instruments.

The standards have been developed based on international research, ABS recommendations for CAI screen design for household interviewing, and results of usability testing for several ABS business survey CATIs. The current standards are applicable to a Blaise environment, however the intention is to guide best practice independent of the technology used.

The graphics used in these standards are illustrative only and do not necessarily reflect the ABS standard question wording. The graphics are designed to be viewed on screen; the larger illustrations may not display properly when printed.

For consistency and convenience, these standards will refer to the user of the interface as "the interviewer" even though when using the CAI interface for IFU or editing purposes, an actual interview may not take place. It is strongly recommended that usability testing is conducted to evaluate the following ABS CAI instruments:

- all new business survey CAI instruments.
- household survey CAI instruments that differ substantially from the standard household survey CAI instruments.

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Typography and text formatting

ABS CAI instruments should follow the typography standards listed below. All the text in the instrument should be left justified. The standard font is Arial. The standard text sizes and styles are as follows:

- Main question text which is always read out - bold, 14 point black.
- Other question text which may be read out - plain, 12 point black (for business survey CATIs); text in brackets (for household surveys CAPIs).
- Completion instructions to the interviewer - bold, 12 point blue and indented (about 10mm).
- Question numbers, which are not read out unless directing respondents to a paper form - plain, 12 point black.
- Question specific notes, on screen plain 12 point black, and in pop-up bold 12 point black.
- Labels for multiple choice answer options in information pane:
- Response lists where the interviewer is to read out the options to the respondent - bold, 12 point blue for "Don't know" and "None of the above" options; bold, 12 point black for other options. See "Running prompt questions" section for more information on this type of question.
- Response lists where the interviewer is not to read out the options to the respondent - plain, 12 point black for response options such as "Yes" and "No"; plain, 12 point blue for "Don't know" and "None of the above".
- Labels for response fields in form pane - plain, 11 point black when unselected, dark blue when selected.
- Heading text for response fields in form pane - plain, 11 point dark magenta.
- Entered responses show up as - plain, 11 point black.
- Words that require emphasis are to be underlined (not in italics or bold). Italics should not be used at all, as it can be difficult to read on the screen.

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Other text formatting standards include:

Numerical fields should be formatted so that commas will automatically separate the digits for numbers at and over 1,000. This reduces the risk of order of magnitude errors. The commas should be included whenever numerical answers are automatically filled into a later question to make it easier for the interviewer to read out.

Diagram 1. Automatic commas in numeric fields

Question 5	1	Yes
Record income	\$3,678,990	
Refusal		

Date fields should be automatically separated by slashes or dots. Whichever format is chosen, it should be used consistently throughout the instrument. Date fields should accept commonly-used formats that may be used by interviewers (e.g. d/m/yyyy, dd.mm.yy). When "enter" is pressed after the date has been typed in, the field should display the date in the standard format that has been chosen for the instrument.

Diagram 2. Automatic slashes in date fields

Question 4	3	Other
Start date	22/3/04	
End date		

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When a reference period date is included in the script, the appropriate date should be automatically generated for all relevant questions. The date should appear in full (e.g. 30 June 2008, not 30/6/08) (see Diagram 3). This is so that interviewers can read out the date without the extra burden of having to convert a numeric month to the actual month.

Diagram 3. Display of automatically generated date in script

I'm ringing you in regards to the Survey of Tourist Accommodation for the period ending 30 June 2008

The time field for the business survey "time taken" question should be in hours and minutes. The preferred format is to split the hours and minutes into two separate boxes, e.g. as shown in Diagram 4.

Diagram 4. Layout of Time Taken fields

Hours	
Minutes	

In questions asking for the duration of an event, when the duration could be reported in different time periods (e.g. weeks or years), the

standard approach is to channel respondents to a question which asks for the duration in the appropriate time period. For example:

Q1. How long have you worked for your current employer?

1. Less than 1 year ---> Q2
2. One year or more ---> Q3

Q2. Record full weeks

Q3. Record full years

Mixed case should be used where possible - words in full capitals should be avoided. An exception to this is information in full capitals that is extracted from PIMS and automatically inserted into the script (e.g. unit name).

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Layout

Horizontal and vertical layouts

The current application being used for CAI instrument development (Blaise) allows for a variety of form layouts. Different layouts are suitable for different types of questions. Whichever layout is chosen, the same layout should be maintained throughout the form.

The most commonly used layout for ABS CATIs is currently the 'horizontal' layout. 'Horizontal' refers to the line between the 'information pane' which contains the question, response options, and interviewer instructions at the top of the screen, and the 'form pane' which contains the responses and data entry cells at the bottom (see Diagram 5). The answer can be chosen by selecting the radio button next to response option, or the respective number can be typed into the bottom space for the question (the former option will automatically fill the respective number into the space). In the horizontal layout, one question appears on the screen at a time in the information pane.

For questions that have many yes/no answers or have multiple choice pick-lists, the horizontal layout is the most suitable. This layout is also generally most appropriate for forms that utilise automatic sequencing, as questions can be automatically skipped without affecting the layout of the questions.

Diagram 5. Horizontal screen layout

Interviewing Jo Bloggs, Male, aged 32

I would like to ask about last week, that is, the week starting Monday the 27th of July and ending last Sunday the 2nd of August.

Last week, did you do any work at all in a job, business or farm?

☒ **1. Yes**
☐ **5. No**
☐ **6. Permanently unable to work**

Person start	1	Continue	More than 1 job	5
----- Labour Force -----			Usual hours	
Sch Attend			Employer or own	1
Date left school			Payment method	1
Study (FT)			Pay arrangements	
Worked last week	1	Yes	Business is employer	
Family business work			Incorporated	
Absent from work			Actual hours	35
			Usual hours	35

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A 'vertical' layout allows for the question on the left side of the screen and the responses on the right. The information pane is hidden, and the question wording is extended within the field pane, with the notes added under the questions (see Diagram 6). This layout is similar to the layout of some ABS Blaise editing instruments.

The vertical layout can be suitable for forms that collect financial or other numeric data. This layout allows more than one question to appear on the screen at a time. It can therefore be utilised when it is desirable for interviewers to be able to see the questions and responses for more than one question on a single screen. The vertical layout is not suitable for forms that have a large amount of sequencing, because in Blaise, this means that skipped questions will be appear as gaps in the list of questions.

Diagram 6. Vertical screen layout

		Current quarter
6 What was the number of nights guests stayed?	April	
	May	
	June	
7 What was the number of guests that arrived?	April	
	May	
	June	
8 What were the accommodation takings including GST?	April	
	May	
	June	

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An alternative to the layout described in paragraph 10 is for the form pane (rather than the information pane) to contain the answer choices (see Diagram 7). For horizontal CATIs that require historical data to be displayed, this layout is suitable, as it allows the data from previous reference periods to be displayed in columns in the form pane. Displaying columns of historical data in the 'traditional' horizontal layout is not possible in Blaise. See paragraphs 28-32 for more information on displaying historical data.

Diagram 7: Alternative horizontal layout for CATIs displaying historical data

Good morning/afternoon this is < your name > from the Australian Bureau Of Statistics. I am ringing you to obtain the number of job vacancies for August.

Establish that you are speaking to the right business contact.
Press 'Enter' to continue.

Job Vacancy Survey - Part 1	Current Data 18/08/2007	19/05/2007
Enter to continue		
1 Same person?	☒ 1. Yes ☐ 5. No	

In the vertical layout, the field labels (for open response fields) appear in the panel to the right of the question, with the corresponding response fields in the next column (see Diagram 8).

Diagram 8. Vertical layout of questions and responses.

1 How many persons were working for MONTVILLE MOUNTAIN INN RESORT on a full-time, part-time or casual basis during the last pay period ending in June 2008?	Full-time	
	Part-time	
	Casual	
2 Were there any significant changes to MONTVILLE MOUNTAIN INN RESORT?	☒ 1. Yes ☐ 5. No	
Please specify the change(s)		

The screen layout should be as simple and uncluttered as possible to help the interviewer find the elements they need easily. There should be top and left margins of about 5mm in the information pane and form pane. The only lines that should be used are those that separate the following: the information pane from the form pane, the field labels from the response fields, and columns of historical data. Task bar icons and other screen elements should also be minimised so that only those required for the instrument are visible, for example see Diagram 9.

Diagram 9. Minimal clutter task bar

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Screen colours

Screen colours should be muted to aid readability and reduce distraction. For CATIs using the horizontal layout, the standard is pale yellow for the information pane background and light grey for the field pane. These are the Blaise default colours. For the vertical layout, the current standard is for all parts of the screen to be light grey (the default colour of the form pane).

Questions and responses

For the horizontal layout, the standard is for one question to appear on the screen at a time. In the vertical layout, several questions can appear on the screen at a time - these should be visible without vertical scrolling.

The question text that is read out should be at the top (horizontal) or left (vertical) of the screen, with any explanatory notes which may be required underneath the question. Explanatory notes that will not fit on the screen can be set up to appear in a pop-up box accessible by pressing F9 (see 'Help information and the F9 function').

If there is a self-administered form (paper or electronic) which the respondent is referring to, there should be question numbers in the CAI instrument which match the question numbers used in the paper form, to avoid any confusion. If sequencing is used in the CAI instrument, this may mean that some question numbers are missing from the instrument. In some cases the CAI instrument may have additional questions that are not on the paper form (for example, questions to establish whether the person is the right person to answer the survey and that they are able to complete the survey at that time). In these cases, the extra questions should be given an alphanumeric identifier. For example, two additional questions that need to appear in the instrument between questions 5 and 6 would be labelled 5a and 5b.

Below the instructions should be an indicator relating to other notes or help which may be available. The lines of question text should be only about 60 characters wide for comfort in reading, leaving some blank space to the right. There may also be completion instructions for the interviewer - this should be placed at the point of the interview where they will be required. All of this information needs to fit on one screen. The interviewer should never have to scroll the information pane to see everything. When the whole question will not fit it should be split somehow or use a pop-up.

If choices between answers need to be made, e.g. yes or no, in an answer space in the information pane as described above and illustrated in Diagram 5, the choices should be indented and use common conventions to suggest type of entry (e.g. radio buttons for mutually exclusive options, check boxes for 'all that apply').

For horizontal CATIs, the form pane at the bottom of the screen contains fields for the responses to all the related questions in a set, whatever type of question is used. Each field should have a short label which is meaningful enough to recognise the question it belongs to. This is to allow the interviewer to see the context of the current question and scan previous answers without having to go back through the form. This can be important to help the respondent make sense of what is being asked.

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Diagram 10. Labels for response fields in form pane

Job title	
Tasks/duties	
Occupation code	
Business/service	
Industry code	
Sector code	
Employer/business	
How long	
Number of weeks	

For the horizontal layout, the response fields should be laid out in columns, with appropriate headings (referring to Part titles, main question numbers etc.) when necessary. Field lists which go to two columns need to be balanced so that there is roughly the same number of fields in each column - if one field is by itself the interviewer may not see it and make errors. Response fields for the vertical layout appear as a single list in the column adjacent to the question. It is important that the field labels are kept brief, so that interviewers don't mistake the field text for the actual question. All response fields on a particular screen should be visible without requiring scrolling.

The field space should be to the right of the field label. Where text responses are entered, the field space should extend across the screen as far as generally required. Small scrolling fields should not be used and pop-up text boxes should only be used where a great deal of text is possible. This usually applies only for the comments question at the end of a business survey CATI, because long text responses should be avoided in interview-based surveys.

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Screens containing no questions

Screens which do not include a question should be avoided as much as possible, as this slows the process down and can be confusing for the interviewer as well as the respondent. An example of this type of screen is one that contains instructions for the interviewer only, followed by "Select 3 to continue" (used commonly in electronic SFMP instruments when interviewers must make a choice between options based on previous answers or information filled from PIMS). Where possible, this type of screen should be removed or combined with another screen.

However, this type of screen may sometimes be unavoidable (for example, when the following question is too long to share a screen). In this case, the screen should be designed to be consistent with the other screens, so that the instructions appear in roughly the same location on each screen, and the space where the question would normally appear is left blank when there is no question. This will allow the

interviewer to learn "where to look" and reduce confusion as to what they should do at these screens.

Historical data

For some surveys, it is desirable for interviewers to be able to view the data provided by respondents in previous reference periods (for example, to compare the current quarter's data with data from the previous quarter, or the same quarter in the previous year). The historical information may feed into edits that prompt the interviewer to check the answer the respondent has provided (see "Edits" for more information). For example, "The number of vacancies for this quarter is a noticeable decrease compared to last quarter. Please comment on any reasons for this change". A prompt such as this may lead to the respondent providing an explanation for the change (which the interviewer should record); or in some cases the respondent may want to revise the previously reported or current figure. Historical data is generally not able to be amended by the interviewer; rather, they make a note of the respondent's revised figure (in a comment field), for the reference of editing staff.

The actual figure provided in the last period should generally not be given to the respondent - rather, they should be told that it has significantly increased or decreased since last time. Providing the exact figure may lead to confidentiality problems, for example, if the business has changed ownership since the last reporting period.

For some household surveys, an option is to incorporate historical data into the question wording to remind respondents of what they reported in the previous period, and to check whether it has changed (e.g. "Last month, you reported you were working at X, is this still correct?"). This type of questioning is sometimes referred to as proactive dependent interviewing. This type of questioning can be useful because it helps the respondent remember the beginning of the time period they should be considering. However, this type of questioning is generally less appropriate for business surveys (where the data requested often requires record-checking) - respondents may be more likely to incorrectly say that their data hasn't changed since last time, because this is easier than figuring out the correct value. Furthermore, confidentiality issues arise when the person the interviewer is speaking to may not be the same person who reported in the previous period.

Historical data can be displayed using both the horizontal and vertical layouts, in column format in the form pane. Each column should have a descriptive heading so that it is clear which reference period it refers to (e.g. Diagram 11). Depending on how many columns are displayed, scrolling may be required to view them all. The relevant survey area should be involved in deciding how many previous reference periods should be shown in the CAI instrument.

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Diagram 11: Columns displaying historical data

Current quarter	Mar 2008 quarter	Dec 2007 quarter	Sept 2007 quarter	June 2007 quarter
-----------------	------------------	------------------	-------------------	-------------------

When only a single response from the previous reporting period is required to be displayed, an option is to have it appear as text in the information pane (e.g. Diagram 12).

Diagram 12: Alternative display of historical data

Q8. Do the values you've provided include GST?

Previous quarter response was: **Yes**

☒ 1. Yes
☐ 5. No
☐ 9. Don't know

Parallel blocks

The CAI instrument interface is made up of "parallel blocks" represented by worksheet-like tabs, for example:

Diagram 13. Tabs of parallel blocks

Main	ProviderDetails	UpdateEnvelope	Form.Exit_Form
------	-----------------	----------------	----------------

The interviewer can move between the blocks whenever they want during the interview and automatic sequencing may also link between them. For consistency, the blocks should only be used for distinct but related pieces. For example, the intensive follow up (IFU) script module for a particular survey, the data collection module for the same survey, a shorter "key data items" version of the survey, and a summary sheet of information about the current provider would be a sensible group of parallel blocks. Parallel blocks may also be used for multiple "forms" for a particular respondent, e.g. for multiple building jobs, or for different respondents from the same household.

The order of the parallel blocks should be kept consistent across surveys, so that interviewers know where to find them. For example, the "Exit form" block used in business survey CATIs for recording the form status to be written back to PIMS, should appear last.

Menu lists and icons should be used for the remaining links to information and functions. These should also be used in a consistent manner.

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Question Structure

Introductions

The introduction of an interview-based survey must do all the work done by the front page of an equivalent paper form and the cover letter

as well. Even if the provider has been mailed information in advance, the person interviewed may not be the same person as the one who received this material. It may have been lost or forgotten. Therefore the introduction needs to find the correct or best available contact person, explain important points like the purpose of the survey and the confidentiality of their responses, and convince the person to respond, immediately if possible.

The introduction should also make up for what the respondent misses through not being able to see the form. This includes explaining to the respondent how long the interview should take (and where relevant, explaining that this will differ depending on their answers if sequencing is involved). The interviewer should also urge the respondent to ask for clarification or additional information if required, to encourage them to access the notes not read out by the interviewer initially. For business survey CATIs that require respondents to provide financial information, the interviewer should let them know in the introduction that estimates are acceptable.

All this needs to be done simply and quickly, so it is essential that this part of the interview is carefully scripted or emphasised in interviewer training. It may be appropriate for some parts of the introduction to be in the form of instructions rather than scripting (e.g. "Establish that you are speaking to the right business contact"), as trying to script such processes may end up sounding robotic. Interviewer training should provide tips on and practice in introducing the survey, and the CAI interface should support doing this well.

Converting self-administered questions into interview questions

It is important to note that an interview, especially a telephone interview is a very different experience for the respondent compared to a self-administered paper form, and keeping the question words and structure very similar may not have the desired effect of similar responses. For most reworded questions, some testing will be necessary to make sure the mode change as well as the wording changes does not result in significantly poorer (or better) data. This is especially important if the collection will continue with both modes.

Many of the questions used in ABS self-administered business surveys are not actually phrased as questions. They are really just titles designed to match sections in our respondents' accounts e.g. "Interest income". When converting these questions into an interview, all these items will need to be reworded to be actual questions e.g. "What was this business's interest income for the period?". Another example is the standard question "Financial period" which in a paper form would normally look like this:

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Diagram 14. Self-completed paper form standard

Period covered by the financial data on this form.

Note

- This form is for the financial year ended 30 June 2003.
- If this business has a different financial year, please report for a 12 month period which ends between 1 July 2002 and 30 June 2003 (e.g. a financial year ending 31 December 2002).

Tick one box

1 July 2002 - 30 June 2003 ... ☐

1 January 2002 - 31 December 2002 ... ☐

Other (Please specify) ... ☐

From

To

To use in a CATI interview, this question needs both the question and the note following to be reworded:

Diagram 15. CATI standard question version

4 What is the financial period used by your business?

If they ask for clarification, say -

* The survey is for the financial year ended 30 June 2003.

* However, if this business has a different financial year, please report for a 12 month period which ends between 1 July 2002 and 30 June 2003. For example, a financial year ending 31 December 2002.

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The answer options also need to be more flexible to help the interviewer capture the respondent's answers, for example:

Diagram 16. Flexible answer options

- 1. "1 July 2002 - 30 June 2003" or "Normal financial year"
- 2. "1 January 2002 - 31 December 2002" or "Calendar year"
- 3. Other

Similarly, information not presented as questions on the paper forms such as contact details will need to be asked about explicitly. Matrices will need to be broken into their component questions, and decisions made as to whether to ask the questions based on rows or columns.

Questions which require the respondent to select one or more options from a list will need to be reworded so that each option is asked about separately, requiring a yes or no answer. This is because reading out even a short list in an interview for the respondent to choose from is prone to bias due to the cognitive difficulty of remembering all the items while making a decision.

It is generally not necessary for each item in a list to be read out as a complete question, e.g. "Did your business have a.... Did your business have a" as this repetition is not needed for the respondent to understand and can become very long and annoying. Beginning with e.g. "Which of the following ... did your business have" is generally enough. However, in these cases it is important to include the question stem on each screen in plain text. For long lists the original question may be several screens back and if e.g. the respondent asks for clarification on one sub-question, the momentum is lost and more information may be necessary for the next sub-question to be meaningful. For example, this question would appear on one screen:

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Diagram 17: Use of question stems and sub-questions

a) First question of a related set

7 The next question asks about IT security measures used by your business. Please answer YES or NO after I read each item in the list or ask for clarification. As at 30 June 2003, did your business use:

a) **Physical security, for example servers in secure rooms or offsite backups?**

and would be followed by this on the next screen:

b) Second question of a related set

b) did the business use **Anti-virus software or a virus scanner?**

When using a plain stem question and bold sub-questions, the bold text should start on a new line below the plain text, except where the sub-questions are very short (see Diagram 18). The bold text indicates that the text is always to be read out, while the plain text may be read out.

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Diagram 18. Layout of lines of question text using stems:

a) long question

b) did your business lodge electronically any
Claims for grants or benefits?

b) short question

b) did your business experience **a Trojan?**

If they ask for clarification, say -

A Trojan is a computer program containing an apparent or actual useful function that contains additional (hidden) functions that allow unauthorised collection, falsification or destruction of data.

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Question wording

For a new survey using CATI, the questions can be worded appropriately from the start. If using a paper form as well, or any other mode, testing should be conducted concurrently so that any particular wording or sequencing required by one mode can be reflected in the others appropriately.

Care should be taken to ensure questions and other scripted components are phrased as clearly as possible, to avoid interviewers misreading the question and making errors. For example, "Which reference numbers are you not familiar with?" is more difficult for interviewers to read and comprehend compared with the more positively phrased "Which reference numbers are you familiar with?"

Avoid using abbreviations in the script - for instance, use "for example" instead of "e.g.", as some interviewers may read out the abbreviation exactly as it appears on the screen. Similarly, avoid using slashes to separate items (e.g. "retainer/wage/salary"), as this makes it harder for the interviewer to read it out - instead, the words should appear as they are to be read out (e.g. "retainer, wage or salary").

Running prompt questions

Running prompt questions require the interviewer to read out a list of response categories one at a time, pausing after each category for the respondent to indicate whether or not the category applies to them. In "single response" running prompt questions, the categories are only to be read out until a "yes" response is given. In "multiple response" questions, all categories are read out, with "yes" recorded against each

applicable category.

It is important to provide consistent instructions to interviewers as to how they should read such lists. It is recommended that the following standard instructions appear in blue text below the question and before the response options:

- Single response questions: "Read out each category until a 'yes' response is given".
- Multiple response questions: "Read out categories, pause after each one for a 'yes' or 'no' response".

In these types of questions, "Don't know" and "None of the above" are often provided as categories at the end of the list for the interviewer to select. These options are not intended to be read out to respondents, and as such, generally appear in the Form Pane rather than the Information Pane. Sometimes the text to be read out is displayed in the Form Pane only (i.e. read-out text and response categories are combined into one). In these cases, to help interviewers remember not to read these options out, it is recommended that these categories appear in blue "interviewer instruction" text (see "Typography" section).

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Response options

It is important to consider how many response options to include in a list, especially when it is an interviewer-coded checklist (i.e. the interviewer chooses the appropriate option/s based on the respondent's answer). When the list is very long, it can be difficult for the interview to quickly find the most appropriate options, while still holding the respondent's answers in their working memory. Primacy effects (being biased towards the items at the top of the list) may therefore be a problem.

The way the respondent provides their answer (e.g. how quickly they provide it, how many different answers they give, and how closely their answers match the words used in the response categories) will impact on the ability of interviewers to quickly and accurately code their answers.

To assist interviewers in their coding, each response item should be as short as possible, and where the list is long, the items should be meaningfully grouped (e.g. alphabetical order for items with easily-recognisable labels). As a rough guide based on research on primacy effects in self-administered questionnaires, 20 items is too many to include.

For 'Yes/No' response options, 'Yes' should have a code of 1, and 'No' should have a code of 5. Coding 'No' as 5 rather than 2 makes it less likely that interviewers will accidentally select 'No' instead of 'Yes', or vice versa. 5 can be converted to 2 during processing if required.

If there are more than 9 response options in a multiple-choice field, the first one should start with code 10. The reason for this is that the key sequence 113, for example, may be interpreted as 1-13 or 11-3. This confusion can be avoided if all values have the same number of digits.

Explanatory Notes

A survey with a large number of explanatory notes is unsuitable for an interview, especially telephone interviewing. The interviewer can't read out extensive notes because this breaks the conventions for telephone conversation and will strain the respondent's comprehension and memory. It is also difficult to encourage respondents to read and remember notes sent to them beforehand. Where practical, a CAI interview should incorporate short notes into the question itself. For example, this Standard Question Wording (SQW) for self-administered forms:

"What was the total gross income of this business during the financial period?"

with the separate explanation:

Excluding

- Extraordinary items
- Goods and Services Tax (GST)

becomes the interview question

"What was the total gross income of this business during the financial period, excluding extraordinary income items and GST?"

For most notes this would make the question too long and awkward. In these cases the notes should be scripted appropriately but not read out unless the respondent asks for or appears to need clarification. This may lead to a reduction in the quality of the interview responses, however this would also occur due to fatigue and frustration should the respondent have to listen to long explanations they don't believe they need. Selective explanations are considered the equivalent to many self-administered survey respondents only reading notes when they get stuck.

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Scales and Measurement units

Where the measurement unit to be used for a particular question is not obvious, in a CAI interview this should be incorporated into the question wording (for example "How long *in years*..." or "What was your business's income.. *in thousands of dollars*"). Even when there is a reasonably small range of ways the respondent could answer, requiring the interviewer to convert the answer to the right measurement unit before entering it in this time-pressured situation may lead to error.

Prompt cards can be used in face-to-face interviews to visual present response scales to respondents, allowing them to read through the list and select the most appropriate option/s. This helps alleviate memory and other response problems that may arise from respondents having to remember a verbally-administered scale. See the Prompt Card Chapter in this manual for information on designing prompt cards.

Prompt cards are generally not used in telephone interviews, and even when the respondent has been sent a paper form (including telephone reporting cards) they often will not have this available during the interview. This means that if the respondent is required to report a particular way, this must be made explicit in the question if prompt cards are not used. For example, if the survey requires the respondent to rate the importance of various items to their business, it is not enough to ask them "How important are the following factors...". They can't see the scale in front of the interviewer, and their answers will generally not match it very well if allowed to answer freely. The question will need to be more like "On a 5 point scale of Very important, Important, Somewhat important, Not very important and Not at all important, please rate the following factors...". Note that this sort of question can get quite long and awkward leading the respondent to forget the scale anyway, so care must be taken when choosing what to ask.

Open-ended questions

There are several types of open-ended questions in CAI instruments. For example, for the "occupation status" question in household survey

interviews, interviewers record respondents' description of their occupation, for later coding. For CATIs based on ABS business surveys, it is mandatory to ask the respondent if they have any comments at the end of the survey. The following wording is recommended:
 "Do you have any comments on this survey or the interview?"

All the text an interviewer enters in a text field should be visible at once and should not require scrolling. The answer box for this comments question should be quite large and in Blaise this means it has to be a pop-up. Interviewers need to be able to skip past this box easily if they don't have anything to enter.

Another area where large text boxes may be required for ABS surveys is for "Other" questions, where the respondent is required to specify any activity which has not yet been covered. In a Blaise CATI this needs to be presented as "Do you have any other..." with a checklist or yes/no filter followed by a separate text option, because there can't be a choice between an open text answer vs a "no" selection for a single field. Generally the CATI also needs to allow for and record when respondents say yes, they have an "other" but refuse to specify what it is, especially when there is a paper form as well which allows this. For example, these answer options:

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Diagram 19. Asking a question about "Other"

a) Answer choices when asking about "Other"

The screenshot shows a list of answer choices for a question. The first option is '1. Record others' which is selected with a radio button. The second option is '5. NO other IT security measures used' which is unselected.

with these answer fields:

b) Response field for asking about "other"

The screenshot shows a table with 7 rows. The first 6 rows are for 'Physical', 'Anti-virus', 'Firewall', 'Authentication', 'Intrusion', and 'Network', each with a '1' in a box and 'Yes' to the right. The 7th row is for 'Policy', also with a '1' in a box and 'Yes' to the right. Below these is a row for 'Other' with a '1' in a box and 'Yes' to the right.

would be followed by a screen with this answer field by itself:

c) Text field for recording "other"

The screenshot shows a text field with the label 'Record others' and a large empty box for the respondent to enter their answer.

If the respondent had answered "no" others, the "record others" screen would be skipped. The text field can also be left blank.

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Time taken

As with all ABS business surveys, collecting "Time taken" is mandatory for CATI surveys. For a full picture of the provider load and better comparison with paper form equivalents, it is important to ask the respondent about any time they may have spent on the survey, apart from the interview. The interviewer can then add this reported time to the interview time, as a total measure of time taken. The recommended wording is as follows:

Please provide an estimate of the time taken to complete this survey, apart from this interview.

Including the time actually spent reading the instructions, working on the questions and obtaining the information, and the time spent by all employees in collecting this information.

In addition, add the approximate time taken to undertake this interview.

There should be two separate fields (Hours and Minutes) for the interviewer to enter Time taken (see Diagram 4). Time taken is one exception where it will generally not be necessary to explicitly mention the measurement unit to the respondent. However, if a particular survey obtains a significant number of answers in "days" for example, extra words explaining that hours and minutes are required may be added.

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Help information and the F9 function

There are several different kinds of help which may be required in a CAI instrument, including:

- technical help for how to use the instrument, generally accessed using the F1 command;
- question specific notes, definitions, inclusions etc.;
- general FAQ-type information such as why the respondent was selected, whether the survey is compulsory; and

- survey specific explanations of e.g. the purpose of the survey, who else it goes to.

It is important to provide interviewers with general FAQ-type information and survey specific information to have on hand, to supplement formal training provided on the survey and CAI instrument. This information may be included in the instrument by presenting it in a separate "parallel block", or from a drop-down menu. Whichever is chosen, the presentation should be consistent.

Question specific information should be presented under the question, as much as will fit sensibly. Any information that will not fit should be included in a pop-up, accessed by using the F9 command. The F9 command is used to display additional information relevant to a particular question or module, that will not fit on the main screen, and/or may not be required by all interviewers for every interview. The F9 function provides a quick and easy way for interviewers to access key information that is not available on the main screen, to help them clarify a question when required.

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Where possible, the most important information for interviewers (e.g. common inclusions and exclusions) should appear as an interviewer instruction on the main screen with the corresponding question. Where necessary, the F9 function can be used to display the following types of information:

- additional definitions, inclusions, and exclusions for a particular question;
- an explanation of why a question is being asked (this is useful for questions that respondents may be reluctant to answer, e.g. income);
- prompt card categories, where these are not reflected in the question or response options (e.g. some questions that utilise prompt cards ask for a yes/no response only, and the response categories do not appear on the main screen);
- conversion tables (e.g. for converting months to weeks);
- other information that will assist the interviewer in selecting the correct response (e.g. for a question about the respondent's highest educational qualification, a hierarchical list of education levels in an F9 is very useful).

Information that already appears on the main screen should not be repeated in F9.

Interviewers are alerted to the presence of F9 information via one of the following instructions, that appears below the question:

- "Press F9 to display further information"
- "Press F9 to display prompt card details"
- "Press F9 to display Months to Weeks conversion table, if necessary".

It is important that the F9 appears at the place where it is needed - e.g. if it relates to a particular question, it should appear with the question, not at the introduction to a topic/module.

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When the F9 key is hit, the information is displayed in a "pop-up" box, using the "Help Language" feature of Blaise. The pop-up box should appear in the blank space to the right of the question, so that as much of the question text and original notes as possible are still visible. There should be a small top and left margin within the pop-up so the text is not cramped against the edge of the box.

There is also the option in Blaise for a "Windows HTML Help File" to be opened (instead of a pop-up box) when F9 is hit. Rather than help text being compiled within the instrument source code as is the case with the Help Language feature, help files are built using the "HTML Help" tool. Only one F9 function can be used within an instrument, i.e. it is not possible to switch between the Help Language and HTML Help function. This function is currently being trialled on a case by case basis.

The advantages of using HTML Help files rather than the Help language feature of Blaise are that:

- content creation and formatting can be done by the HSC;
- the content could feasibly be changed after the instrument is out in the field (as the instrument would not require recompilation, provided only the content referred to by an existing tag is changed);
- formatting is more flexible (e.g. hotlinks can be used); and
- there is a reduced effort by TA to program and format the Help Text.

The way in which interviewers are informed that F9 information is available, and the formatting of the F9 information presented, should be consistent within an instrument.

Consistency in the use of F9 between instruments for different surveys is also important. In terms of the specific content of F9s, it is recommended that for standard modules such as education and income, standard F9s are developed and used in CAI instruments. F9 content is developed as part of the question specifications for a survey; advice on wording for questions or F9s is beyond the scope of these guidelines.

The definitions, explanations, inclusions, exclusions etc. contained in household survey Interviewer Instructions (IIs) can be appropriate to include in F9s. During an interview, it is often easier for interviewers to be able to access the relevant information by pressing the F9 key, rather than searching for the information in the printed IIs. It should be made clear to interviewers that the F9 information is there to assist them *if required*, i.e. they are not expected to view every F9 in an instrument.

For some surveys it may be useful for there to be some cross-referencing between a CAI question or module and the relevant part of the IIs. This should be done by adding references to the IIs (e.g. module codes in the table of contents), rather than by adding references (e.g. II page numbers) to the F9 text. IIs are often subject to a large amount of change in the lead-up to a survey, and adding page number references to F9 text (whether created in a pop-up or HTML Help file) creates too great a risk of errors in the cross-referencing.

Formatting the F9 information in a clear and intuitive way is important to ensure that interviewers can find the relevant information quickly. Ideally, F9 information should be sufficiently concise that it fits on a single pop-up screen without requiring scrolling. However, this may not always be possible, and scrolling will be required to view all the information. As an approximate guide, a single screen fits around 20 lines of text before scrolling is required. Each line fits approximately 40 characters.

If the information runs for longer than one screen, a risk is that interviewers will not realise more information is available by scrolling down. To overcome this, the information should be positioned so that it is reasonably obvious that more text exists below. For example, when there are several blocks of text, it is best to ensure that the shorter section is first and the second section runs over onto the next page (rather

than the longer section fitting perfectly on the screen, with the shorter section entirely out of view).

There should be sufficient text spacing to maintain the readability of the text. For example, in a list of prompt card categories, there should be a blank line between each category to make it clear when one category ends and another begins. A clearly laid-out F9 that requires scrolling is preferable to an F9 in which the text has been condensed to fit on one screen.

Presenting information in dot points, and using clear headings to organise information, is also recommended to enable interviewers to find relevant information more easily.

Ensuring that the presentation of the F9 information is clear is an important part of instrument validation.

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Functionality

Sequencing

Electronic forms such as CAI interfaces allow for much more complex sequencing than paper forms (whether self-administered or interviewer-administered) because the sequencing is automatic. There can be large numbers of branches off to separate modules and back again. Making sure the logic is correct can be tricky and requires thorough testing.

An important thing to remember in this context is how to account for differences when using a paper form as well as a CAI instrument. While this does not happen very often for household surveys, for business surveys, CATI is often used in conjunction with a paper form option. In some cases, the respondent may have the paper form in front of them while they are completing the telephone interview. It is tempting to include more sequencing in the electronic version than in the paper version. However, while the forms may be theoretically the same, a paper form allows incorrect routing such as filling in questions out of order, which may lead to differences in the data collected due to the mode (i.e. a mode effect).

Editing rules (for processing the data later) need to be determined to address the mode effect that results. For instance, should all the answers a respondent puts in questions they should have skipped be removed? If the electronic version has more skips, is a skipped question equivalent to a "no" or a "non-response" in the data files from the paper version? Decisions should be made on the treatment of these issues at the development stage and implemented consistently.

When testing the sequencing, it is important to ensure that if the interviewer is required to go backwards through the interview after having gone down the wrong sequencing path (e.g. during SFMP), any information already entered which is relevant to both paths will transfer to/ remain in the new path. Having to ask for the same information more than once in the one interview will be frustrating and confusing for the interviewer and respondent.

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Navigation

Wherever possible for any electronic form, navigation should be possible using either or both of keyboard and mouse. The current standards are that:

- The interviewer can't go forward through the form within a parallel block unless valid data is entered in every applicable field. While a menu option allowing the interviewer to skip a field is available, it is recommended that an appropriate answer field (e.g. "Don't know") is used instead wherever this kind of response is likely, so that a better picture of what has happened is available.
- Pressing Enter after completing each field takes the interviewer to the next field. For some comments fields such as the final question, where it is valid to have no response, Enter should take the interviewer to the next field anyway. Typing anything but Enter opens the pop-up window and while in the window, Enter starts a new line of text and the interviewer should click on "save" to close. Navigating back to a comments field allows the interviewer to type over the previous answer. Double-clicking or pressing "insert" allows the interviewer to append extra information.
- Clicking with the mouse or arrow keys may also be used to go to the next field to complete, or go up and down between completed fields within one field pane set (which will change the question presented at the top of the screen).
- The "Tab" key takes the interviewer to the next field, however this method includes the radio buttons and other answer choice fields which can cause the interviewer to become lost. This method should therefore be discouraged.
- Page up and down on the keyboard, and icons at the top of the screen for the mouse, may be used to take the interviewer backwards and forwards through whole completed screens.
- A drop down menu option "Search tag" allows the option of going directly to a completed field rather than needing to skip through the intervening fields. The interviewer needs to type in whatever is programmed into the instrument as the tag for that particular question (e.g. EDUC_05).
- The bar at the very bottom of the screen should tell the interviewer what question they are up to and also give an indication of how much they have to go - the current standard is a count of what screen out of the total they are at.

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Diagram 20. Progress indicator

16/46	Q8	10:15:40 AM	Modified

Remarks

In addition to the Comments parallel block (which allows the interviewer to make comments about the interview or respondent as a whole) there should also be a function to make comments specific to a question e.g. "This was a wild guess". Blaise allows this with the "Remark" function which creates an attached comment using a paper clip icon. The icon is shown here:

Diagram 21. Interviewer Comments tab and Remark icon

Stop Interview					Forms	Answer	Navigate	Help
BUITSurvey Provider_Information Interviewer_Comments								

Selecting it causes a pop-up, and when a remark is saved in the pop-up this is indicated next to the answer field as below, with a double-click bringing the remark back up:

Diagram 22. Response field with attached Remark

Virus	0 1	Yes
-------	-----	-----

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Edits

Although automatic edits can be one of the main advantages of any electronic form, they should be used with caution. Constant error messages can be very frustrating for both the interviewer and the respondent. The current standard for newly developed CAI instruments is minimal edits. These can include simple range and data type restrictions, as well as internal consistency checks such as the end date for a given financial period being later than the start date, and numerical breakdowns each being smaller than the relevant total.

The emphasis of the edits for new instruments should be to prevent data entry mistakes without slowing the process down too much. They should not be used to question the accuracy of the respondent's answers. The edit message should be meaningful and usually allow the interviewer to continue without correcting their entry (i.e. a "soft" rather than "hard" edit). However, hard edits may be appropriate in some circumstances to ensure the data provided is in the correct format (e.g. ABNs must have eleven digits).

Diagram 23. Internal consistency edit message

Questions involved	Value
End date	22/02/2004
Start date	22/03/2004

Fill capability

It is important that when the CAI script refers back to previously learned information, such as the contact's name or the answer to a related question, this information is filled automatically into the current text. The filled information should be the same font, size and style as the text around it so that it appears to belong there.

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References

These standards were developed based on the research of other statistical agencies as well as ABS experience and Blaise standards. Some relevant references regarding the design and appropriateness of CATI and other telephone surveys include:

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Summary for use by CAI developers

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Computer Assisted Interviewing (CAI) Interface Design Standards: Summary for Use by CAI Developers

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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Introduction

This document provides a summary of the Computer Assisted Interviewing (CAI) interface design standards, and is intended to be used as a reference guide by CAI developers. Readers of this summary are referred to relevant paragraphs of the main standards for additional information and explanation of the standards.

In this document, the term "CAI" covers both Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) and Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) instruments.

The graphics used in these standards are illustrative only and do not necessarily reflect the ABS standard question wording. The graphics are designed to be viewed on screen, and may not display properly when printed.

For consistency and convenience, these standards will refer to the user of the interface as "the interviewer" even though when using the CAI interface for IFU or editing purposes, an actual interview may not take place.

It is strongly recommended that usability testing is conducted to evaluate the following ABS CAI instruments:

- all new business survey CAI instruments.
- household survey CAI instruments that differ substantially from the standard household survey CAI instruments.

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Typography and text formatting

All the text in the instrument should be left justified. The standard font is Arial. The standard text sizes and styles are as follows:

- Main question text which is always read out - bold, 14 point black.
- Other question text which may be read out - plain, 12 point black (for business survey CATIs); text in brackets (for household surveys CAPIs).
- Completion instructions to the interviewer - bold, 12 point blue and indented (about 10mm).
- Question numbers, which are not read out unless directing respondents to a paper form - plain, 12 point black.
- Question specific notes, on screen plain 12 point black, and in pop-up bold 12 point black.
- Labels for multiple choice answer options in information pane:

- Response lists where the interviewer is to read out the options to the respondent - bold, 12 point blue for "Don't know" and "None of the above" options; bold, 12 point black for other options. See "Running prompt questions" section of CAI Standards for more information on this type of question.
- Response lists where the interviewer is not to read out the options to the respondent - plain, 12 point black for response options such as "Yes" and "No"; plain, 12 point blue for "Don't know" and "None of the above".
- Labels for response fields in form pane - plain, 11 point black when unselected, dark blue when selected.
- Heading text for response fields in form pane - plain, 11 point dark magenta.
- Entered responses show up as - plain, 11 point black.
- Words that require emphasis are to be underlined (not in italics or bold).

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Other formatting standards include:

- Numerical fields should be formatted so that commas will automatically separate the digits for numbers at and over 1,000.

Diagram 1. Automatic commas in numeric fields

Question 5	1	Yes
Record income	\$3,678,990	
Refusal		

- Date fields should be automatically separated by slashes or dots, and formatted consistently throughout the instrument. Date fields should accept commonly-used formats (e.g. d/m/yyyy, dd.mm.yy). When "enter" is pressed after the date has been typed in, the field should display the date in the standard format that has been chosen for the instrument.

Diagram 2. Automatic slashes in date fields

Question 4	3	Other
Start date	22/3/04	
End date		

- When a reference period date is included in the script, the date should be automatically generated for all relevant questions. The date should appear in full (e.g. 30 June 2008, not 30/6/08) (see Diagram 3).

Diagram 3. Display of automatically generated date in script

I'm ringing you in regards to the Survey of Tourist Accommodation for the period ending 30 June 2008

- The "time taken" question for business surveys should be split into two fields (hours and minutes).

Diagram 4. Layout of Time Taken fields

Hours	
Minutes	

- In questions asking for the duration of an event, the standard approach is to channel respondents to a question which asks for the duration in the appropriate time period. For example:

Q1. How long have you worked for your current employer?

1. Less than 1 year ---> Q2
2. One year or more ---> Q3

Q2. Record full weeks

Q3. Record full years

- Mixed case should be used where possible - words in full capitals should be avoided.

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Layout

Horizontal and vertical layouts

Default horizontal layout

This is the default Blaise layout and is the standard format used for household survey CAI instruments. A horizontal line separates the Information Pane and the Form Pane (see Diagram 5). One question appears on the screen at a time in the information pane. This layout is suitable for surveys which have many yes/no answers, multiple choice pick-lists, and automatic sequencing.

Diagram 5. Horizontal screen layout

Interviewing Jo Bloggs, Male, aged 32

I would like to ask about last week, that is, the week starting Monday the 27th of July and ending last Sunday the 2nd of August.

Last week, did you do any work at all in a job, business or farm?

- ☒ 1. Yes
☐ 5. No
☐ 6. Permanently unable to work

Person start	1	Continue	More than 1 job	5
----- Labour Force -----			Usual hours	
Sch Attend			Employer or own	1
Date left school			Payment method	1
Study (FT)			Pay arrangements	
Business is employer			Incorporated	
Worked last week	1	Yes	Actual hours	35
Family business work			Usual hours	35
Absent from work				

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Alternative horizontal layout

For horizontal layouts that require historical data to be displayed in columns, the alternative horizontal layout is suitable. The form pane (rather than the information pane) contains the answer choices (see Diagram 6).

Diagram 6: Alternative horizontal layout for CATIs displaying historical data

Good morning/afternoon this is < your name > from the Australian Bureau Of Statistics. I am ringing you to obtain the number of job vacancies for August.

Establish that you are speaking to the right business contact.
Press 'Enter' to continue.

Job Vacancy Survey - Part 1	Current Data 18/08/2007	19/05/2007
Enter to continue		
1 Same person?	☒ 1. Yes ☐ 5. No	

Vertical layout

In this layout, the questions are on the left of the screen and the answer fields are on the right, allowing more than one question to appear on the screen at a time (see Diagram 7). The vertical layout is not suitable for forms that have a large amount of sequencing as skipped questions cannot be 'hidden'. The questions should be visible without scrolling.

Diagram 7. Vertical screen layout

		Current quarter
6 What was the number of nights guests stayed?	April	
	May	
	June	
7 What was the number of guests that arrived?	April	
	May	
	June	
8 What were the accommodation takings including GST?	April	
	May	
	June	

The screen layout should be as simple and uncluttered as possible. There should be top and left margins of about 5mm in the information pane and form pane.

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Screen colours

For CATIs using the horizontal layout, the standard is pale yellow for the information pane background and light grey for the field pane. For the vertical layout, the current standard is for all parts of the screen to be light grey.

Questions and responses

If there is a self-administered form which the respondent is referring to, there should be question numbers in the CAI instrument which match the question numbers used in the paper form. If the CAI instrument requires additional questions that are not on the paper form, the extra questions should be given an alphanumeric identifier (e.g. two additional questions between questions 5 and 6 would be labelled 5a and 5b).

Below the instructions should be an indicator relating to other notes or help which may be available. The lines of question text should be about 60 characters wide, leaving some blank space to the right. There may also be completion instructions for the interviewer. All of this information needs to fit on one screen. The interviewer should never have to scroll the information pane to see everything. When the whole question will not fit it should be split somehow or use a pop-up.

Form pane fields should have a short label which is meaningful enough to recognise the question it belongs to.

Diagram 8. Labels for response fields in form pane

Job title	
Tasks/duties	
Occupation code	
Business/service	
Industry code	
Sector code	
Employer/business	
How long	
Number of weeks	

For the horizontal layout, the response fields should be laid out in columns, with appropriate headings (referring to Part titles etc.) when necessary. Field lists which go to two columns need to be balanced so that there is roughly the same number of fields in each column. Response fields for the vertical layout appear as a single list in the column adjacent to the question. It is important that the field labels are kept brief, so that interviewers don't mistake the field text for the actual question.

The field space should be to the right of the field label. Where text responses are entered, the field space should extend across the screen as far as generally required. Small scrolling fields should not be used and pop-up text boxes should only be used where a great deal of text is possible (e.g. "comments" question in business survey CATIs).

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Screens containing no questions

Screens which do not include a question (e.g. "Select 3 to continue") should be avoided as much as possible. If it must be used, the screen should be designed to be consistent with the other screens, so that the instructions appear in roughly the same location on each screen.

Historical data

Historical data can be displayed using both the horizontal and vertical layouts, in column format in the form pane. Each column should have a descriptive heading so that it is clear which reference period it refers to (e.g. Diagram 9).

Diagram 9: Columns displaying historical data

Current quarter	Mar 2008 quarter	Dec 2007 quarter	Sept 2007 quarter	June 2007 quarter
-----------------	------------------	------------------	-------------------	-------------------

When only a single response from the previous reporting period is required to be displayed, an option is to have it appear as text in the information pane (e.g. Diagram 10).

Diagram 10: Alternative display of historical data

Q8. Do the values you've provided include GST?

Previous quarter response was: **Yes**

☒ 1. Yes
☐ 5. No
☐ 9. Don't know

Historical data is generally not able to be amended by the interviewer.

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Parallel blocks

The CAI instrument interface is made up of "parallel blocks" represented by worksheet-like tabs (e.g. Diagram 11). The order of the parallel blocks should be kept consistent across surveys, so that interviewers know where to find them (e.g. the "Exit form" block used in business survey CATIs should appear last).

Diagram 11. Tabs of parallel blocks

Main	ProviderDetails	UpdateEnvelope	Form.Exit_Form
------	-----------------	----------------	----------------

Question Structure

(See CAI Interface Design Standards for information on introductions, question wording, explanatory notes and scales/measurement units).

Running prompt questions

For running prompt questions, the following instructions should appear in blue text below the question and before the response options:

- Single response questions: "Read out each category until a 'yes' response is given".
- Multiple response questions: "Read out categories, pause after each one for a 'yes' or 'no' response".

Response options

For 'Yes/No' response options, 'Yes' should have a code of 1, and 'No' should have a code of 5. If there are more than 9 response options in a multiple-choice field, the first option should start with code 10.

Open-ended questions

For CATIs based on ABS business surveys, it is mandatory to ask the respondent if they have any comments at the end of the survey. The following wording is recommended:

"Do you have any comments on this survey or the interview?"

A pop-up should be used for the answer box for this comments question. Interviewers need to be able to skip past this box easily if they don't have anything to enter.

Another area where large text boxes may be required for ABS surveys is for "Other" questions, where the respondent is required to specify any activity which has not yet been covered. In a Blaise CATI this needs to be presented as "Do you have any other..." with a checklist or yes/no filter followed by a separate text option, because there can't be a choice between an open text answer vs a "no" selection for a single field. Generally the CATI also needs to allow for and record when respondents say yes, they have an "other" but refuse to specify what it is.

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Time taken

Collecting "Time taken" is mandatory for business survey CATIs. The recommended wording is in Diagram 12. There should be two separate fields (Hours and Minutes) for the interviewer to enter Time taken.

Diagram 12: Time taken question

Please provide an estimate of the time taken to complete this survey, apart from this interview.

Including the time actually spent reading the instructions, working on the questions and obtaining the information, and the time spent by all employees in collecting this information.

In addition, add the approximate time taken to undertake this interview.

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Help information and the F9 function

General FAQ-type information and survey specific information can be included in the instrument by presenting it in a separate parallel block, or from a drop-down menu. Whichever is chosen, the presentation should be consistent.

Question specific information and interviewer instructions should be presented under the corresponding question. Any information that will not fit should be included in a pop-up, accessed by using the F9 command. See paragraph 75 of the main standards for the types of information that can be included in F9. Information that already appears on the main screen should not be repeated in F9.

Interviewers are alerted to the presence of F9 information via one of the following instructions, that appears below the question:

- "Press F9 to display further information"
- "Press F9 to display prompt card details"
- "Press F9 to display Months to Weeks conversion table, if necessary".

The pop-up box should appear in the blank space to the right of the question. There should be a small top and left margin within the pop-up, and there should be sufficient text spacing to maintain the readability of the text. See paragraph 87 of the main standards for the appropriate layout of pop-up screens that require scrolling.

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Functionality

Sequencing

When testing the sequencing, it is important to ensure that if the interviewer is required to go backwards through the interview after having gone down the wrong sequencing path (e.g. during SFMP), any information already entered which is relevant to both paths will transfer to/ remain in the new path.

Navigation

Navigation should be possible using either or both of keyboard and mouse. The current standards are that:

- The interviewer can't go forward through the form within a parallel block unless valid data is entered in every applicable field. While a menu option allowing the interviewer to skip a field is available, it is recommended that an appropriate answer field (e.g. "Don't know") is used instead.
- Pressing Enter after completing each field takes the interviewer to the next field. For comments fields where it is valid to have no response, Enter should take the interviewer to the next field anyway. Typing anything but Enter opens the pop-up window and while in the window, Enter starts a new line of text and the interviewer should click on "save" to close. Navigating back to a comments field allows the interviewer to type over the previous answer. Double-clicking or pressing "insert" allows the interviewer to append extra information.
- The bar at the very bottom of the screen should provide a count of what screen out of the total the interviewer is up to.

Diagram 13. Progress indicator

16/46	Q8	10:15:40 AM	Modified

Remarks

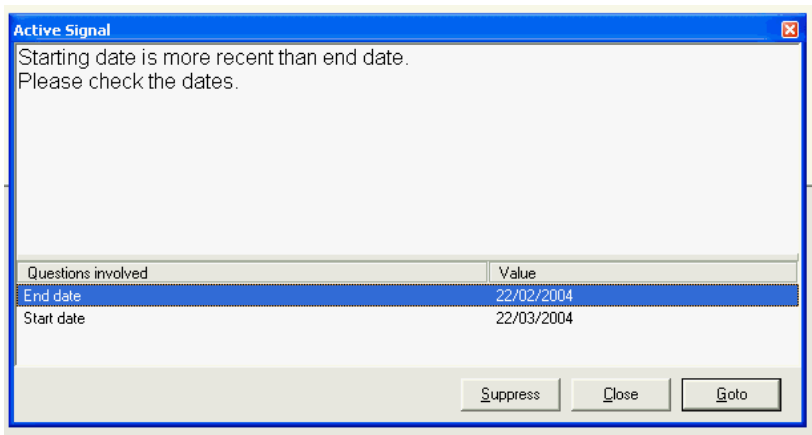
(See CAI Interface Design Standards for information on the "Remark" function, which can be used by interviewers to make comments specific to a particular question).

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Edits

The standard for newly developed CAI instruments is minimal edits (e.g. simple range and data type restrictions). The edit message should be meaningful and usually allow the interviewer to continue without correcting their entry (i.e. a "soft" rather than "hard" edit). However, hard edits may be appropriate in some circumstances to ensure the data provided is in the correct format (e.g. ABNs must have eleven digits).

Diagram 14. Internal consistency edit message



Fill capability

When the CAI script refers back to previously learned information (e.g. the contact's name), this information should be filled automatically into the script, and should be in the same font, size and style as the text around it.

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Prompt Cards

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PROMPT CARD GUIDELINES

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

Contents

- Introduction
- Number and structure of Response Options
- Appropriate presentation of cards
- Layout
- Visual Design
- Typography
- Spacing
- Language
- Summary Checklist

Introduction

These prompt card guidelines have been designed for use in ABS Household surveys. The guidelines aim to ensure ABS prompt cards are designed according to best practice and are consistent across surveys. The guidelines have been compiled from ABS experience, international research and best practice standards used in the Office of National Statistics (UK) and Statistics New Zealand. *Note - The visual examples used in these guidelines are adapted from prompt cards used in ABS surveys (except where noted otherwise), and may not reflect current wording.*

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Number and structure of Response Options

Number of prompt cards

Prompt cards are used in interviews to visually present response categories to respondents, allowing them to read through the list in their own time. While prompt cards can be very useful in assisting respondents to select the correct response, they should be used only when necessary. Where there is only a small number of simple response categories (e.g. yes/no), a prompt card is unlikely to help the respondent, and is therefore unnecessary. Limiting the number of prompt cards to those essential for helping the respondent reduces the overall number of cards required at each interview. This is more practical for the interviewer and can also reduce the respondent's perceived burden of the interview.

Numbering of prompt cards

It is recommended that each module should be given an alpha-numeric code, and the cards be numbered in ascending order within each module. For example, if the first module is on personal characteristics, then this module will be called A. If the next module is on income, then this module will be B. Cards within each module will be numbered from 1 upwards (i.e. Module A cards will be numbered A1, A2, A3 etc., and Module B cards will be numbered B1, B2, B3 etc.). This is because prompt cards may need to be changed in between the dress rehearsal and the final enumeration, and it is easier to renumber cards within a module than an entire survey set. The code should appear in the top right hand corner of the prompt card.

Number/Order of Response Options

The response options on the prompt card should be comprehensive so that they cover the most commonly provided answers (as identified in pre-testing). However, this needs to be balanced with ensuring that the list is not overly long. Long lists of response options increase the risk of primacy effects (where respondents are more likely to choose the first applicable option from the top of the list, without reading the entire list). Long prompt cards can result in questions having to be repeated as respondents are more likely to forget the question after reading the card. It is recommended that unordered lists should not have more than 9 response options listed at any one time. Where there are more than 9 response options, consideration should be given to using headings to group them by theme (see 'Grouping of categories' below), or (where possible) asking a series of questions with fewer response options. However, this is not always possible due to user requirements such as the use of international standard questions or output categories.

Numbering for consistency with CATI/CAPI

If there are more than 9 response options in a multiple-choice list on a prompt card, the numbering should start at 10 rather than 1, for consistency with Blaise programming standards. This is to avoid ambiguity in the responses entered by the interviewer. For example, the key sequence 113 may be interpreted as 1-13 or 11-3. This confusion can be avoided if all values have the same number of digits.

Rating Scales

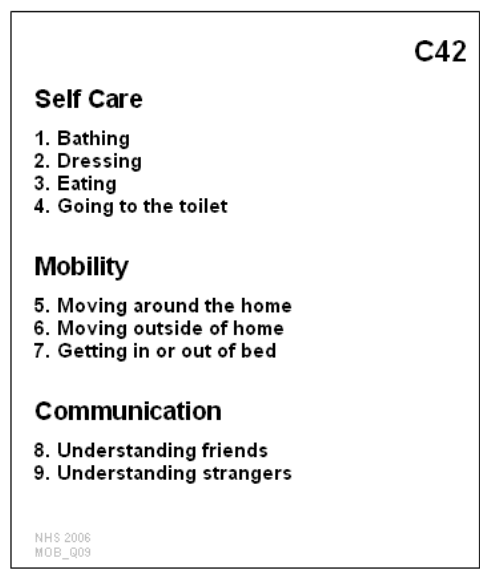
Often prompt card response options contain rating scales. Here categories need to be balanced so there are an equal number of positive and negative choices. A neutral response option should also be provided. It is also generally better if negative options are presented first in the list, especially for sensitive questions. This is to show the respondent that it is acceptable to choose a negative option, should they wish to do so. In general, three or five categories is the appropriate number of options for rating scales.

Grouping of categories

To avoid using an excessive number of unordered response options, there are two approaches that can be utilised. The first approach involves arranging the options into groups such as main and subcategories. This is outlined in the diagram below. While grouping related responses can help provide structure to the list, headings used to group lengthy response options by theme can be misleading as some respondents can be led to believe they need to choose one response per thematic group. Instructions must be clear if headings are used (see the 'Instructions' section), and the use of headings to group themed options should be consistent throughout the survey.

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Diagram 1.1: Grouping of Categories



The second approach lists the main categories on one prompt card and uses separate cards for the subcategories in each heading. This approach is more suitable when the list of response options is too long to display clearly on one page. It is useful to add an example to the main categories so that respondents know whether the category applies to them.

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Diagram 1.2: Alternative Grouping of Categories

C42

- 1. Self Care** (e.g. bathing)
- 2. Mobility** (e.g. around the home)
- 3. Communication**
(e.g. understanding friends)

NHS 2006
MOB_Q09

C43

Self Care

- 1. Bathing**
- 2. Dressing**
- 3. Eating**
- 4. Going to the toilet**

NHS 2006
MOB_Q09

'Don't know', 'Refusal' and Other Options

"Don't know" and "refusal" options should not be placed on the prompt card, even if they are placed on the pick list for the interviewer. Whether it is appropriate to include an "other" or "other (specify)" category on the prompt card is dependent on the survey itself and the nature of the topic.

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Appropriate presentation of cards

Folders, booklets or laminated cards

The method used to display prompt cards will vary according to the length of the enumeration period and the number of prompt cards. For surveys which are longer than 4-5 months, and/or when there are a large number of prompt cards, it is better to keep the prompt cards in a folder with plastic sheets for increased durability. Many interviewers prefer to use a folder as it is easier to keep the pages clean. Folders also allow for easier replacement of cards which need updating during enumeration when this is required. Booklets are generally used when the survey has a shorter enumeration period and there are not too many prompt cards.

One advantage of using a booklet is that it avoids the possibility of glare coming from the plastic sheets of the folder. However, folders have an advantage over booklets as bound booklets have the tendency to fall apart. It should also be possible to acquire matt finished plastic for folders.

Laminated cards with a matt finish are an alternative option, to ensure durability of prompt cards that will be re-used in the future. It is not appropriate to use high gloss finish cards, as the glare from the cards can interfere with respondents' ability to read the response options. Due to the costs associated with laminating cards, the method of presentation may not always be possible.

Repeat identical non-consecutive prompt cards

For non-consecutive questions with the same response options, duplicate prompt cards should be used rather than flipping backwards to an earlier prompt card. Flipping backwards gives the respondent the impression that the interview is not progressing. Where consecutive questions require an identical prompt card, a single version is sufficient (i.e. the respondent can stay on one card for two or more consecutive questions).

Duplicate copies of individual prompt cards

Generally, interviewers should have at least two sets of cards in case one set gets lost/damaged. However, the number of duplicate sets is also dependent on the length the survey is out in the field. The longer a survey is in the field, the greater is the necessity to have duplicate copies, due to general wear and tear. Duplicate sets are also useful in cases where interviewers have to leave a booklet behind for telephone interviews, or if group interviews are being conducted. Two to three sets are generally sufficient, however, this will vary across surveys.

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Layout

Consistency and Sequence

Two important principles should be followed when designing prompt cards: consistency and sequence. All of the type, graphic and layout conventions outlined in these guidelines should be followed consistently through all the prompt cards. Lack of consistency may lead to confusion and errors.

Portrait versus Landscape

Portrait format is recommended over landscape format. This is because no more than 70 characters per line should be used, as more than 70 characters on one line can be tiring to read. Landscape format allows more than 70 characters to be used, which makes the portrait format a better option.

Full Page Layout

A full page layout creates a spread-out arrangement of options, which is often the most attractive layout. A split-page layout, where the categories appear in two columns with a vertical line in between, is another option if there is a lengthy list of response options. However, this layout can be more difficult to read. It is generally recommended that if space is an issue, the font size is reduced (to no less than size 16 font - see "Type Size"), or categories are split into more than one page.

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Visual Design

Use of Colour

The use of different coloured paper to distinguish and identify different prompt cards can enhance efficiency. However, the use of colour to enhance efficiency must be weighed against the cost of printing on coloured paper. For printing in-house, the current cost of an A4 sheet of white paper is 1 cent, while a coloured A4 sheet is 2 cents (this cost excludes the cost of printing text/images onto the paper). Generally, colour can be deemed useful in the following situations:

- *The complexity of the survey:* for complex surveys with numerous prompt cards, different colours can be used to distinguish modules or topics.

- *Concurrent Surveys:* It can be useful to use different coloured prompt cards for surveys that are being run concurrently with the same interviewer group.

- *Household spokesperson:* It has been suggested that the first prompt card which is used for the household spokesperson be printed on different coloured paper.

Caution must be used when choosing the colours to be used, as different colours elicit different reactions in respondents, and this could bias their responses. It is recommended that dark text is used on lightly coloured paper, as white paper can create a glare which can make reading difficult. Off-white or cream coloured paper is preferred, but other light coloured paper can also be considered, as long as contrast and readability are maintained. As noted above, using coloured paper will increase printing costs, so may not always be possible. In these cases, the use of white paper is acceptable.

Colour combinations that should never be used are red and green, and yellow and purple, as the combination impedes legibility.

Use of Graphics

For prompt cards which contain graphics, ensure that the graphics adequately represent the response they require. It can be time consuming and difficult for interviewers to clarify the meanings of images on prompt cards. Accordingly, images should be carefully chosen.

For increased legibility and better distinction between different items, it is recommended that graphics are printed in colour rather than black and white.

Graphics that do not have a functional purpose (i.e. to represent the response option) should not be used. This is because respondents can often confuse the difference between an image that is used as a supplement to enhance the survey, and an image that merely embellishes the survey for aesthetic purposes.

The following two images depict the problems that can arise when using graphical representations on prompt cards. Health surveys often use images of vegetables to clarify the meaning of a 'serve of vegetables.' There is the potential for respondents to read the image literally, and assume that the only vegetables being referred to are the vegetables in the picture.

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Diagram 1.3 (From Cancer Institute of NSW)



Diagram 1.4 (From Limes and Lycopene: What actually is 5 serves?)



The following example is a more appropriate use of prompt card graphics. The quantity of alcohol within each type of drink is clearly labelled, making the image less ambiguous.

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Diagram 1.5 (From NSW Office of Drug and Alcohol Policy)

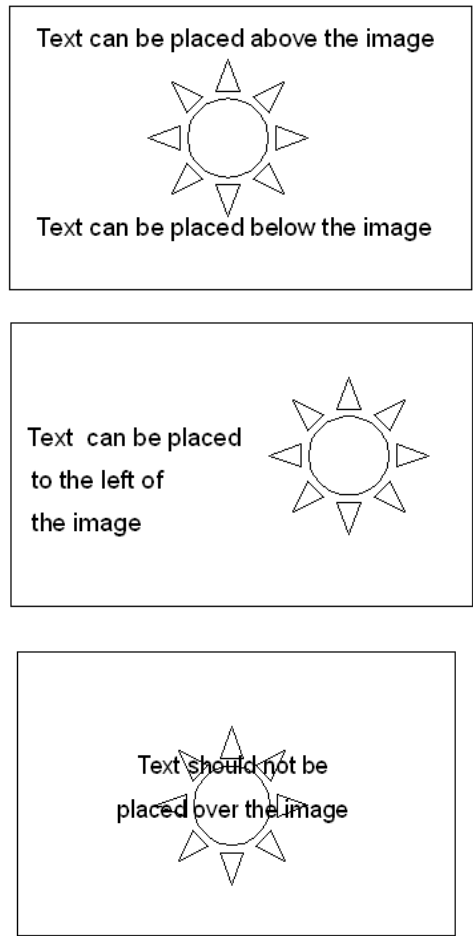


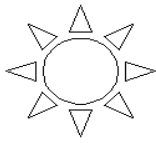
Images and Illustrations

Images should be placed above, below or to the right of the text, to ensure that the images do not confuse the eye. Text that is placed to the right of the image can make the text difficult to read, as the pattern of reading English is from left to right.

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Diagram 1.6: Placement of Images





Text should
not be placed
to the right
of the image

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Typography

Typeface

ABS forms use one of the following four typefaces: Arial, Verdana, MS Sans Serif or Times New Roman, depending on the mode. However, they should not be mixed together on the same form. This also applies to the use of typeface in prompt cards. For short lines of prose, sans serif fonts (e.g. Arial and Verdana) are generally more readable. It is therefore recommended that Arial or Verdana be used for prompt card text.

Upper Case Text

Upper-case text is difficult to read. It is recommended that text be set in lower case, using capitals for the start of key words and the first letters of sentences. Capital letters can also be used for the letters of appropriate names, titles and abbreviations.

Whole words should not be set in capitals, as the words lose their distinctive shapes when they are capitalised, all becoming converted into rectangles. This makes reading and comprehension more difficult.

Diagram 1.7: Capitalising Letters

WORDS LOSE THEIR DISTINCTIVE SHAPES WHEN CAPITALISED.

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Type Size

It is important to remember that prompt cards are not read at the same distance as one reads a book or newspaper, and as a result font needs to be larger. It is recommended that a minimum of size 16 font be used on prompt cards. This is because most partially sighted people require larger font between sizes 16 and 22. This recommendation will also suit respondents who have less than perfect eyesight or failing long distance eyesight.

- *Categories* :In certain situations where both main categories and subcategories are used, the main categories should be placed in a larger size, to differentiate the two. The difference should be at least 4 points larger (e.g. subcategories in 16 size font, main categories in 20 size font).
- *Reduction*: If an answer option has one or two words that do not fit on one line, it is recommended that the font be reduced for all options on that card to fit the option onto one line only (however, ideally the font size should be no smaller than size 16 font). In cases where type size is altered on one prompt card, it is recommended that the type face is changed on cards only where this problem occurs, where there are a small number of cards which have this problem. Otherwise the size should be changed consistently for all the cards.
- *Additional information*: It is recommended that any information that the respondent does not need to read, such as office information (e.g. the question module and question number), be placed in the bottom corner, in font size 10 and in grey/drop-out colour, so that it does not draw the respondent's attention away from the main text (See Diagram 2.2). Office information should only be included if it will be useful for the interviewers. Information that may be useful to include here includes question numbers, question module identifiers, the survey name (abbreviated) and the year of the survey. Including this information is useful for interviewers in case the cards get out of order or mixed up with prompt cards from another survey, and need to be re-ordered.
- *Card Identifiers*: Card labels or identifiers (which identify the chronological card number) should be set at 24 font size.

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Selective Emphasis

Use emphasis selectively. It is recommended that different typographies are not mixed together for emphasis. For example:

Diagram 1.8: Inappropriate Selective Emphasis

DO NOT USE CAPITALS. BOLD AND UNDERLINE ALL TOGETHER

Emphasis of key words should only be used when it is essential for data quality. When extra emphasis is required, bold is preferable to upper case letters (Couper 2008:156). Underlined text may also be used. For example, it is recommended that the no/none response category be underlined on prompt cards, to assist respondents in identifying this option.

Justification and Alignment

Left justified text is recommended for prompt cards. This includes all main and sub-categories and all response options. Left justified text is easier to read and allows the respondent to follow the natural reading path. It also avoids awkward breaks in phrases and sentences that can occur when text is fully justified.

Prompt cards should have margins of about 2.5cm on each side of the page.

Instructions

Instructions should be positioned above the response categories and placed in bold italics type. They should be the same size as the rest of the text.

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Diagram 1.9: Appropriate use of instructions

B7

You may choose more than one response:

- 1. Shortness of breath.**
- 2. Chronic Pain**
- 3. A nervous or emotional condition**
- 4. Long term effects as a result of a heady injury**
- 5. Any other long term condition that requires treatment or medication**
6. Any other long term condition such as arthritis, asthma, heart disease etc

NHS
MED_Q15

Instructions should be included in the following situations:

- If multiple response options are allowed, the instruction "You may choose more than one response" should be placed in italics at the top of the prompt card.
- If response options have been grouped into sub-categories but only one response is required, the instruction "Please choose one response only" may be placed in italics at the top of the prompt card.
- If response options have been grouped into sub-categories but one response is required from each sub-category, the instruction "Please choose one response from each category" should be placed in italics at the top of the prompt card.

This is not an exhaustive list of instructions. Any other instructions should be clearly worded and placed in italics at the top of the page. The font size used should be the same as the response options.

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Spacing

Line Spacing

The recommended spacing between response options is 1.5 to 2 lines, if there are no subcategories or subgroups. If there are main categories and subcategories, there should be:

- 2 lines between the main sections
- 1 line between the subcategories within each section
- 1.5 lines between the main category and first subcategory

Diagram 2.0 : Appropriate line spacing

C25

Government

1. State
2. Federal
3. Local council

Educational Institutions

4. University
5. TAFE
6. Business College

SET07
EDU_Q14

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Spacing between response options and their identifiers

There should be a small amount of space between the response option and its corresponding identifier or number. The two should be clearly linked for the respondent.

Diagram 2.1: Appropriate use of space

D31

1. Friend
2. Neighbour
3. Family member
4. Work colleague
5. Community organisation
6. Government service
7. Health Professional
8. Other

NHS 08
GEN_012

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Language

Technical Terms

Technical terms, industry-specific definitions and statistical terms should be avoided unless you have evidence that respondents understand what they mean. If you do not have this evidence, explain the term in appropriate language.

CAI Screen Layout

The interviewer prompts that say "Show Prompt Card" should be in blue interviewer instruction text, to ensure that interviewers notice the prompt before the question is read out. This is important when there are numerous interviewer prompts on screen, and the interviewer has the potential to miss the prompt.

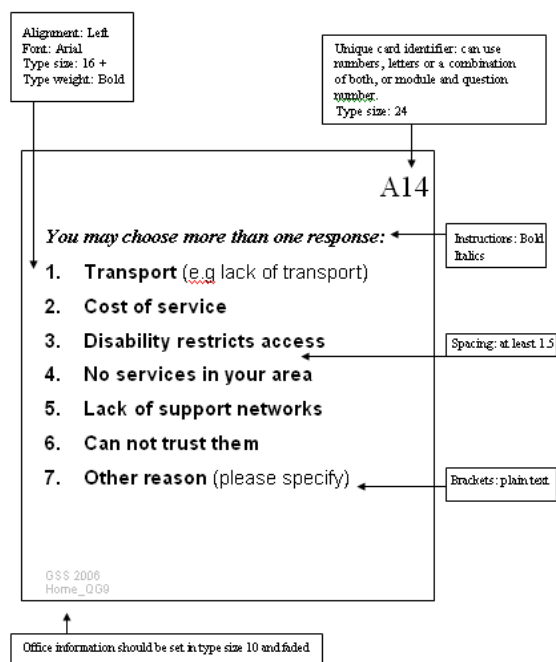
Consistency with CAPI screen

Prompt cards are accessed in Blaise instruments via the F9 key function. Prompt cards should preferably match the CAPI version to ensure consistency between what the interviewer and respondent can see. It is also important that the order of options in the card matches the order spoken in the question.

Due to space/formatting restrictions in Blaise, when the list of response categories is large, the Blaise instrument may not have the space to include all of the examples shown on the prompt card. In these cases, it is acceptable for the Blaise version to omit some of the examples provided on the paper version.

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Diagram 2.2: Annotated example



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Summary Checklist

Use of headings

- The use of headings to group options should be consistent throughout the survey.
- Instructions must be clear if headings are used to group themed responses.

Number/Order of Response Options

- Where possible, it is preferable to not have more than 9 response options.
- If there are more than 9 response options, it may be better to group response options into subcategories and use more than one prompt card.

Numbering for consistency with CATI/CAPI

- If there are more than 9 response options in a multiple-choice list on a prompt card, the numbering should start at 10 rather than 1, for consistency with Blaise programming standards.

Numbering of prompt cards

- It is recommended that each module should be given an alpha-numeric code, and the cards be numbered in ascending order within each module.

Grouping of categories

- List categories vertically from top to bottom.
- If double columns are used, provide enough space between each column and separate them with a line. Do not use triple columns.

Layout

- Use portrait format.

Spacing

- Ensure enough space is left for binding cards.
- Recommended spacing when there are no subcategories is between 1.5-2 lines.
- When there are main categories and subcategories, it is recommended that 2 lines are left between the main section, 1.5 lines between a main category and the first subcategory within that section, and 1 line between the subcategories within that section.

Default Margins

- Default margins should be set at about 2.5 cm on all sides

Images

- Images should be placed above, below or to the right of text.

- Images that do not have a functional purpose should not be used.
- Ensure that images are unambiguous.
- Use colour for images to make them easier to distinguish.

Colour

- Use black text against white, cream or lightly coloured paper.

Typography:

- Use ABS recommended sans serif font such as Arial or Verdana.
- Use type size 16 to 22.
- Use a larger type size by 4 to 6 points for subcategory headings and instructions.
- Use type size 10 faded text for interviewer and office instructions.
- Use type size 24 bold text for card numbers/identifiers.

Appropriate presentation of cards

- Present the cards in a folder or bound booklet (depending on the length of enumeration).
- Repeat identical non-consecutive prompt cards rather than flipping backwards.
- Use A4 cards for printing.
- Prompt cards should show identical response options to those shown on CAPI screens.
- Interviewers should have at least two sets of cards in case one set gets lost/damaged.

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References

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Survey Letters

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Survey Letters-Introduction

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SURVEY LETTERS

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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Introduction

There are many different letters in use across the ABS. This document covers the general standards and guidelines for business survey letters, although many of the principles included will apply to other letters. Issues specific to induction letters, pre-approach letters, covering letters or reminder letters can be found in the topic specific sections of this chapter of the Forms Design Standards Manual. If a style of letter is not covered here, please contact either Data Collection Methodology (DCM) section or the Provider Contact Unit for further information.

These standards are primarily concerned with printed letters, although emails and faxes are also sent by the ABS to survey participants. In general, the text of emails and faxes should be of the same high standard as a printed letter. The specific standards for emails are covered by the final section in this chapter. Specific standards for letters sent by fax are included in the Survey Fax Design Standards in this manual.

These standards were developed in part using research presented to the Business Provider Relations Strategy Committee in 2004.

The following describes the letters that are most commonly used by the ABS.

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Pre-approach letters (new on/continuing)

Pre-approach letters are mailed to respondents prior to the enumeration of a survey. The aim of this correspondence is to inform respondents of the survey's imminent arrival as well as briefly explain the purpose of the survey and the respondent's role in it. In the ABS, pre-approach letters are also called induction letters, contact letters, pre-despatch letters, primary approach letters and "new-on" letters. See Survey Letters-Pre-Approach Letters for further details. For the purpose of these standards pre-approach letters have been broken into 2 categories. The difference between these categories is briefly explained below.

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New-on

The pre-approach, new-on letter is used when:

- the survey is new; or
- the respondent is new to the survey.

This letter briefly alerts the respondent to the ensuing arrival of the survey form. As the provider may not have been selected in an ABS survey before, the letter explains why their business or organisation is being surveyed as well as what is being requested of them. This letter will also include a broad time period within which the survey will arrive and a specific due date for the return of the form to the ABS. This type of letter may include an information sheet which provides the respondent with detailed information regarding the survey.

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Continuing

Pre-approach continuing letters are sent to respondents who have already completed at least one cycle of the survey. This letter will alert respondents that the next round of the survey is due to commence very soon. This letter will also explain to respondents their continuing role in the survey and what is requested of them. It will include the broad time period within which the survey will arrive may have a specific due date for return to the ABS. Most importantly, pre-approach letters to continuing respondents will acknowledge and thank the respondents for their assistance in the previous enumeration periods.

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Induction letter

The induction letter is a special pre-approach letter for new-ons that requests contact details. This allows for the survey to be sent directly to the most appropriate contact person in the business. See Survey Letters-Induction Letters for further details and an example.

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Information sheet

The information sheet can be included with pre-approach letters or cover letters, especially those to new respondents to help them understand their selection in an ABS survey. The Information sheet explains in detail any extra information about the survey the respondent might find useful that is not already explained on the form itself. See Survey Letters-Information Sheets for further details.

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Covering letters (new on/continuing)

Covering letters detail the reason the survey is being run and what the provider (new or continuing) needs to do to comply with the ABS. The covering letter is sent with the survey form and includes a due date for the form's return. See Survey Letters-Covering Letters for further details and an example. The differences between the two covering letters are explained below.

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New-on

The new-on covering letter is sent to respondents who have not been part of the survey before, whether the survey is new or continuing. The letter explains in greater detail than the pre-approach letters described above, the survey topic, the reason the respondent has been selected and what they are required to do. As this may be the first contact the respondent has had with the ABS, this letter is very important to assist with their understanding of the organisation and its important role.

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Continuing

The continuing covering letter is sent to respondents who have been part of at least one survey cycle. Similarly, this covering letter is more detailed than the pre-approach letters, covering the survey topic, the reason the respondent has been selected and their role. Because this respondent has been in the survey for at least one other cycle the letter should acknowledge and thank them for their assistance in the previous enumeration periods.

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First reminder

The first reminder is sent to respondents if the ABS has not received the survey form and the due date has elapsed. It is a gentle reminder which assumes the respondent has forgotten to respond and requests that they do so as soon as possible. See Survey Letters-Reminder Letters for further details and examples.

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Second reminder

The second reminder is sent to respondents who have not yet responded to requests to return the form. Generally, these respondents should have been sent the first reminder or may have received other forms of communication with the ABS requesting they respond to the survey. The second reminder contains a stronger message requesting information and detailing the capability of the ABS to direct the respondent to respond. See Survey Letters-Reminder Letters for further details and examples.

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Third reminder

The third reminder contains the strongest message. It is sent to respondents who have failed to comply with all other requests for information. The letter is clearly marked as urgent. It details the capability of the ABS to direct the respondent to comply and the consequences of not complying with the request to provide data. See Survey Letters-Reminder Letters for further details and examples.

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Electronic communications

Any e-communications with respondents (whether the content of a particular message is sensitive/ confidential, or not) should be secured/ encrypted as per Government and ABS policy. ABS policy discourages the use of insecure e-mail, for example, email addresses on forms or other material, particularly for specific individuals. The concern is that this form of contact will encourage respondents to send the ABS confidential information, the security of which cannot be ensured.

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Survey Letters-Typography

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TYPOGRAPHY

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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Introduction

Typography is the art of organising the printed word on a page. To use typographic contrast effectively, it is essential to use it in a consistent and controlled way. The controlled use of type faces is an important aid to a respondent reading and understanding the letter. See chapter 5 of the main Forms Design Standards for more details.

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Typeface

Font

ABS letters, including the headings, should be written in Times font. Times is a serif face font. (The serifs are the little curls at the extremities of letters.) In general, large slabs of text are more readable when set in serif faces.

Text size

The text sizes recommended in these standards are intended to balance readability with the amount of information which may be fitted on a single page. The text size for the body of letters should be 10 point. Letter headings should be 12 point. Headings within the body of the letter should be 10 point. Larger text may be used where appropriate, for example in cases where many of the target respondents are expected to be elderly.

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Formatting

Correct formatting should help the reader to navigate smoothly down the page in the appropriate sequence while highlighting important information.

Leading capitals

Text should be set in lower case, using capitals for the start of key words in form titles, the first letters of sentences, section headings and captions. Capital letters should also be used for the first letter of appropriate names, titles, and abbreviations. Using all uppercase to emphasise words is poor and should be avoided. This is because the words lose their distinct and easily recognisable shapes, which slows reading.

Bold

Bold should be used to emphasise key words. Examples of key words include headings, due date and freecall number. Bold should be used sparingly and consistently.

Underlining

Underlining words also interferes with the ability of people to use the shape of a word to assist reading. Underlining should be used sparingly and consistently.

Italics

Italics should be used when referring to either the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* or ABS publications by title.

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Headings

The purpose of a heading is to increase the ease and speed at which information can be found. Headings can be useful when seeking specific information, or alternatively skipping information which the reader may not think is relevant. This technique of finding information is particularly useful when reading large amounts of text.

DCM recommend that headings on all business survey letters be restricted to those at the top of the page. The reasons for this recommendation follow.

- i. There is not enough information in the letter for it to need a system of navigation. For example, a heading to highlight a one line sentence about the due date is just repeating most of the text, and is redundant when the information is already high-lighted by the due-date itself being bold.
- ii. As headings are used to find the information that the reader feels is relevant, it is possible that in such short passages of text, such as those in ABS letters, respondents will be encouraged to skip information under headings they judge to be unimportant. In the case of ABS letters it is important that respondents read the entire letter.
- iii. Headings increase the amount of eye movement necessary for the respondent to read the entire letter.
- iv. Headings draw attention away from other important bold information in the text, such as the due date and the freecall number. With headings present, the *relative* importance of this information is reduced.
- v. Headings may cause the standard letter to run onto two pages, which would inevitably increase printing costs and reduce the effectiveness of the letter.

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If headings cannot be avoided

If headings cannot be avoided, they should be kept short and meaningful. All information should belong to a heading for consistency and to avoid the reader skipping over 'hidden text'.

Headings should be kept within the body of the text rather than in their own column on the left side, for the following reasons.

- i. Headings on the side force the respondent to read the page in an unnatural progression (having to read headings that are unusually far to the left), increasing respondent eye movement (burden) and disrupting the flow.

- ii. When headings are required, having them on the side can make it difficult for the respondent to determine the beginning and end of the section belonging to each heading.
- iii. Side headings take up a column of space to the left of the page. In some cases this will cause the letter to unnecessarily run onto a second page.
- iv. Laying out the page neatly with side headings and appropriate margins and justification is operationally more difficult than one column of text.

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Margins

The dimensions for standard ABS letterhead should be as follows:

- Left margin - 25.4 mm
- Top right margin - 64mm
- Top margin - 74 mm
- Bottom margin - 25.4 mm
- Gap between address label and letter - 10 mm.

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Justification

Full justification is suitable for large blocks of text including text of survey letters. For a more professional look, text of paragraphs should be fully-justified. Text is fully justified when the columns of text align to both left and right margins. In order to make the lines of equal length the spacing between words is adjusted or long words at the end of lines are hyphenated. Left justified right ragged text should only be used for short lines of text, for example, the narrow columns of split-page formatted text in many ABS publications. For research on text comprehension supporting fully justified text see, for example, Wheildon (1990).

The heading and type of letter being used (if appropriate) should be centre-justified. Text is centre-justified when each line is centred about a midpoint on the letter.

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References

- Wheildon, C. (1990) A study of the validity - or otherwise - of some elements of typographic Design, *Communicating or just making pretty shapes*, Newspaper Advertising Bureau of Australia Ltd., Sydney.

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Survey Letters-Common Content

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Common Content

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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- Introduction
- Salutations
- Collection reference
- Purpose of the survey
- Collection authority
- Confidentiality
- Help available
- Thank you
- Signature authority
- Date
- Postscript
- References

Introduction

It is important for the ABS that the many survey letters produced have a common theme. To achieve this it is necessary to ensure as much common content as possible. Unless stated otherwise the information which follows applies to all letters. Use this document as a general guide and then check the relevant chapter for the specific needs of each letter type. These standards apply even when a survey is user-funded and co-branding with other organisations is used.

All letters should be designed with the following in mind:

- appropriate language should be used;
- important elements should be stressed; and
- the 'message' should be plain and consistent with that of other letters.

Letter content should be kept as brief as possible. Include only what is necessary, to ensure the provider is able to complete the task set. For example, detailed instructions which relate to the completion of the form, or specific definitions relating to the topics covered are included within the form and are therefore not needed in letters.

Survey letters should also be persuasive. Respondents need to be convinced to participate in ABS surveys willingly, quickly and accurately. Towards this end, these standards have been based in part on the psychological principles of social influence developed by Groves and Cialdini (1991).

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Salutations

The name and address of the respondent should be included wherever possible, however, if this information is not available, or is impractical due to bulk mailings, a salutation should not be used. An obvious sign to the respondent of unimportance is to begin a letter with "Dear Respondent/Citizen/Resident/Friend". Letters addressed in this manner are more likely to be disregarded by the respondent as a standard junk mail letter.

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Collection reference

The title of the collection should in most cases be at the top of the letter. It should follow a salutation if there is one. The reference line should be 12 point, bold, in leading capitals and centred. The collection title should also contain the survey reference period.

For example :

"Economic Activity Survey 2005-06"

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Purpose of the survey

The purpose of the survey should always be included. Not only does the purpose statement provide information about the collection, it is a chance to explain to the respondent that the request for data is important and useful to the community. It should be a brief, unbiased explanation of how the information collected is going to be used and for what purpose.

The purpose statement in letters should always be different from the purpose statement on the front of the corresponding form and for each subsequent letter. This is important to ensure that respondents read the information on the front of form and subsequent letters. If respondents see that the purpose paragraph is exactly the same as one they have just read, it is likely that they will skip it and also assume that the rest of the information is simply repeated and not worth reading.

Respondents are more likely to comply if they get something in return (the principle of reciprocation). The content of the purpose statement is also a chance to increase respondents' intrinsic motivation (and likelihood of complying) by explaining the long term value of the survey and if possible, the effects of the information collected relative to the respondent. This can be tailored to individual collections or sub-groups of the survey population.

For example:

"The information collected is used by the small business community and government policy makers to base important decisions, which have the potential to directly or indirectly affect your business."

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If appropriate, the purpose paragraph should also mention that other similar businesses (or organisations, households, people etc.) have been selected. Studies have shown that respondents should be more likely to comply if they perceive that others similar to themselves would comply. This principle is based on the theory that with compliance comes social validation.

For example:

"Your business, and many similar businesses, have been selected to represent..."

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Respondents are more likely to comply with requests that are perceived as being a rare (scarce) opportunity to participate. A rare opportunity may cause the respondent to feel as though they are privileged to have been given the opportunity to represent others, and may be a form of incentive. If the survey is a one-off collection, mention of this in the purpose is important.

For example:

"This is the first time that the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has conducted this type of survey."

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Collection authority

All letters must include a statement of authority. The strength of this statement will increase from the basic statement in the covering letter to information about the Statistician's Power of Direction in the second and third reminders. The version required for reminder letters will vary according to the desired overall message and number of reminders being used.

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Confidentiality

All letters must include a statement of confidentiality. As the confidentiality of our data is integral to the functioning of the ABS, this is a very important part of any letter. In early letters such as covering letters.

For example:

"Your completed form remains confidential to the Australian Bureau of Statistics."

The statement varies for the second and third reminder letters. At this point the ABS is attempting to overcome objections to completing the survey form. The statement informs the respondent of the penalties ABS staff face for any breach of confidentiality. The strength of the statement of confidentiality will vary (like the collection authority statement), according to the message the ABS wishes to send. Some surveys have complex confidentiality issues, for example when 'passive' confidentiality is used or the respondent's data may be matched with other information. Explaining these issues in detail may be counter-productive so be careful.

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Help available

Information about available help should be included for two reasons. Firstly, the respondent should be able to call the ABS for assistance if they have misplaced their form, or if they need help filling-out the form. And secondly, respondents are more likely to comply if the request is coming from someone whom they like. The offer of help is an automatic trigger for 'liking', so conveying that the ABS is approachable is important. The freecall number should be bold and should be kept all on one line for ease of reference.

For example:

"If you have any queries about this survey or require assistance in completing the form by the due date, please contact the ABS on **freecall 1800 XXX XXX**."

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Enhancing the principle of 'liking' further may be achieved by adding the office hours during which help may be obtained. This information is especially useful to add if the office hours have been extended for that particular survey, to ensure respondents actually know they can access help outside normal business hours. Remember to include what time zone the hours refer to.

For example:

"If you need help completing the form or would like to discuss this matter further, please call **1800 XXX XXX** (freecall). Our freecall service operates Monday to Friday from 7:00am to 6:30pm EST to assist with your enquiry."

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Thank you

Saying 'thank you' is one of the easiest ways to indicate to the respondent that their time and efforts are appreciated. Apart from simply being a polite inclusion of any request, 'thank you' is also a form of social exchange. The 'thank you' paragraph thanks the respondent for their time and consideration and invokes a feeling of importance by suggesting that the survey is only successful with their help.

For example:

"I would like to thank you in anticipation of your prompt response to this important request for information."

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Signature authority

All letters should include the signatories' name and a real-looking signature. It is also important for the "Australian Bureau of Statistics" to be written under the survey manager's name in the signature block. The perception of authority and legitimacy are of utmost importance when the respondent is considering the action to respond, and the name of the organisation will have a stronger impact than the collection area. Also remember that ABS job titles might not mean anything to the respondent, so to convey appropriate authority the title needs to actually sound important.

The signature block should generally come straight after the main body of the letter. When there is no salutation, there should not be a closing in the manner of e.g. "Yours faithfully" either. A relationship with the respondent has not usually been established at this point so this personal approach is inappropriate and also takes up space. An individually addressed letter may use "Yours sincerely", which is the standard corresponding formal closing.

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Date

The date is often the first point of personalisation of the cover letter. It is an element of all professional letters, and should not be excluded from a survey cover letter just because of variable mailing dates. It is also a useful point of reference for the respondent. The correct date is the date the letter is 'signed', not the date the letter is despatched. The date should be included at the bottom of the signature block under "Australian Bureau of Statistics".

For example:

Survey Manager's signature

Survey Manager's name
Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

Day Month Year

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Postscript

Because postscripts are one of the most visible aspects of a letter, they are a good place to have important information that the survey manager wishes the respondent's attention to be drawn to. The recommended use of a postscript is to refer to the ABS website or a web

address specific to the survey, if this address is meaningful. Alternatively, the postscript can be used to reiterate thanks for participation.

For example:

P.S. The ABS makes available a wide range of useful statistics free-of-charge, thanks to the data provided by people such as you. For details, see the ABS website, www.abs.gov.au.

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References

Groves, R.M. and Cialdini R.B., (1991) Toward a useful theory of survey participation, *American Statistical Association, Proceedings of the Survey Research Methods section*, 88-97.

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Survey Letters- Pre-Approach Letters

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PRE-APPROACH LETTERS

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

Contents

- Introduction
- Example of pre-approach letter

Introduction

Pre-approach letters are used for both new and continuing surveys. They are mailed to respondents in the weeks prior to despatch of the survey form. Their primary role is to alert the respondent to the imminent arrival of the survey form and motivate compliance.

Pre-approach letters that collect contact details are called induction letters, which are described in Survey Letters-Induction Letters. Survey managers generally take advantage of being able to collect the correct contact details of the respondent, therefore, induction letters are more commonly used than pre-approach letters in the ABS.

Nonetheless, a pre-approach letter alone is still an excellent opportunity for survey managers of new collections to obtain important unit information which may not match current information on the frame. Even the act of mailing the pre-approach letter is useful because it will determine the number of 'return to senders' (RTSs). The potential cost savings of not sending a form to these RTSs can be huge. Not only will the survey manager save time and money by not sending a form to those addresses, the frame can be up-dated and the resources saved can be redirected to Intensive Follow-up (IFU) to improve response rates and data quality.

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For letter details common to all letters, see Survey Letters-Common Content. The remainder of this document deals with the areas specific to pre-approach letters.

Pre-approach letters are short, standard letters that briefly describe the purpose of the collection, when the form will arrive and often the due date for the survey form's return. This letter is a good opportunity to raise the respondent's motivation to comply by presenting the ABS as an approachable and helpful organisation (freecall number provided) which collects information to help inform important decision making which has the potential to affect the respondent.

The difference between a pre-approach letter for new providers and continuing providers is that the continuing providers are thanked for their previous co-operation. This should be done within the first two paragraphs of the letter.

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Example of pre-approach letter

Units selected in the new Business Characteristics Survey (BCS) remain in the survey for five years, with the data contributing to the ABS's Business Longitudinal Database (LBD). Respondents are more likely to comply with a request for information if they have done so in the past (principle of consistency), so encouraging initial response to this survey was very important. This pre-approach letter was mailed to all respondents, which also helped to uncover the return to senders (RTSs) before the live survey.

Business Characteristics Survey 2004-05

Every day, people make important decisions based on the wide range of high quality statistics produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The quality and usefulness of these statistics rely heavily on the cooperation of people like yourself who complete ABS surveys. Your business, along with approximately 3,000 other Australian businesses, has been selected to represent small and medium businesses in the new Business Characteristics Survey (BCS).

The results will be used by Commonwealth and State government agencies to evaluate and develop policies designed to promote the growth and improved performance of small and medium business in Australia. This has the potential to directly or indirectly affect your business. The survey will also contribute to the ABS's new Business Longitudinal Database and a publication on business characteristics and performance to be released later this year.

Your business will remain in the survey for five years. This period will enable analysts to explore factors that impact on business productivity and performance over time. Each year your business will receive a survey form for which most questions asked only require a tick box response to minimise the effort in completion.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. Your completed form remains confidential to the ABS.

The first BCS form will be sent to you in early March. Our testing has shown that the owner or manager of the business is usually best placed to provide the information sought. This form does not require an accountant to complete as no financial details are required. If you are not the best person to complete this survey or there is updated information available for any aspect of the address, please contact us on freecall 1800 681 979 by **22 February 2006**.

I would like to thank you in anticipation of your cooperation.

Yours sincerely

Acting Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

3 February 2006

P.S. The ABS makes available a wide range of useful statistics free-of-charge, thanks to the data provided by people such as you. For details, see the ABS website, www.abs.gov.au.

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Survey Letters-Induction Letters

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INDUCTION LETTERS

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

Contents

- Introduction
- Due date
- Contact details
- Example of induction letter

Introduction

Contact details are often necessary before despatch of the survey to ensure that the survey reaches the most appropriate person in the organisation. The best way to get the correct contact details is to send out an induction letter. The letter briefly informs the respondent as to the topic of the survey and requests that they fill-in the contact details as soon as possible and return them to the ABS.

For letter details common to all letters, see Common Content. The remainder of this document deals with the areas specific to induction letters.

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Due date

Letters should explicitly state the request being made. One of the most important indicators of a request and an expectation is the presence of a due date. Usually the due date for return of contact details is accompanied by an instruction to use the "reply paid envelope". The due date for return of contact details requested in the induction letter should always be "as soon as possible".

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Contact details

The contact details allow the ABS to correctly select the most appropriate contact person to complete the survey form. Collecting these details prior to the survey's despatch ensures a smoother and perhaps quicker survey response.

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Example of induction letter

This one page (double-sided) induction letter informs providers that they have been selected in an ABS survey, and requests contact details. Respondents are also advised that they can either fill out a form monthly, or provide data over the phone. Obtaining the best time to call the business's contact person in advance assists the call centre to operate efficiently.

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Form RCD1

▼ In correspondence, please quote this number

Dear Sir/Madam

Your business has been selected for inclusion in the monthly Retail Business Survey.
Enclosed with this letter is:

- A Telephone Reporting Record - you may find it useful for recording the information that will be required from you each month; and
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Business Surveys Charter which sets out our responsibilities in dealing with you.

About the survey

The Retail Business Survey is conducted under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act, 1905* and is one of the key economic indicators used by government and the retail industry to assess the performance of this important sector of the economy. Monthly retail trade statistics are compiled from turnover data provided by all large retailers and a sample of smaller retail businesses. Businesses of your size are so significant to the quality of the data produced that you will be surveyed every month.

The survey can be completed by phone or by mail. As most businesses prefer to report the required information by phone we have included a record for telephone reporting. We will contact you within the first two weeks of each month to obtain the turnover of your business for the previous month. The Telephone Reporting Record provides detail on the information that we require from you each month. Experience shows that the average interview will take no longer than about two minutes.

What we need you to do

Please complete the contact details form on the reverse of this letter and either fax it to us or post it back in the reply paid envelope as soon as possible.

We will contact you shortly to explain more about the survey and to answer any questions you may have. If you have any queries in the meantime, please contact us on our free call number 1800 020 635.

Yours faithfully

Survey Manager
Retail Business Survey

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Commonwealth Government Statistical Clearing House Approval Number:

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Survey Letters-Information Sheets

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INFORMATION SHEETS

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

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- Introduction
- Example of an information sheet

Introduction

Several different pieces of information may be part of a single package sent to respondents. This section deals specifically with the information sheet, which can accompany letters to give more detail. The information already covered in that letter (the "common content") need not be repeated in the information sheet but the typography and formatting standards still generally apply.

The information sheet is a short document which contains detailed information about some or all of the following:

- who the ABS is
- frequently asked questions on the survey
- what the information is used for
- examples of output tables with previous survey data
- why the respondent was selected

- how long the respondent will be part of the survey
- the compulsory nature of the survey and the power of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*
- the confidentiality of the responses
- the due date for the survey
- any assistance the respondent might require

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Example of an information sheet:

The ABS The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is Australia's official statistical agency. Our mission is to 'assist and encourage informed decision-making, research and discussion within governments and the community, by providing high quality, objective and responsive national statistical service '. Questions on the survey form A schedule of questions is enclosed. From testing undertaken by the ABS, it is anticipated that most businesses will have the information requested available from standard accounts. Should full accounting information not be available at the due date, careful estimates will be acceptable. What is this information used for? Statistics from this survey provide key measures on the performance of Australian industry and are used in the measurement of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the Australian National Accounts. Why have you been selected? This survey is collected from a random sample of businesses which represents the wider business community. The ABS cannot replace businesses during the survey period. This would bias the survey results as each selected business represents itself and many others. How long will you be in this survey? Once a business has been selected, a form is sent each quarter. The ABS minimises the survey load placed on businesses by using a sample, ensuring the requested data conforms to Australian accounting standards and including small businesses in any survey for no more than three consecutive years wherever possible. Is the survey compulsory? Your cooperation is sought in completing the survey form. The <i>Census and Statistics Act 1905</i> provides the ABS with the power, if needed, to direct you to supply the information. Your response is confidential The data will remain confidential to the ABS. The information is released in aggregate form which does not allow the identification of data from individual businesses. Due date for survey form A survey form will be sent in late December 2004. Your cooperation is sought in completing and returning this survey form by 7 January 2005. Assistance Information on the survey, including responses to frequently asked questions is available on the Business Indicators Home Page, under "Themes" , at www.abs.gov.au. Alternatively, you can obtain assistance in completing this form by telephoning the Australian Bureau of Statistics on free call 1800 642 14.

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Survey Letters-Covering Letters

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COVERING LETTERS

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- Introduction
- Opening paragraphs
- Purpose of the survey
- Due date
- Authority and confidentiality
- General tailoring
- Specific tailoring

Introduction

The cover letter is usually the first point of contact (unless a pre-approach letter is used) for respondents receiving an ABS survey. Its content provides information and a freecall number, and is another chance to reassure respondents that their cooperation is greatly appreciated and expected by law.

Covering letters should be designed with the following in mind:

- appropriate language should be used;

- important elements should be stressed; and
- the 'message' should be plain.

For letter details common to all letters, see Survey Letters-Common Content. The remainder of this document deals with the areas specific to covering letters.

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Opening paragraphs

Some covering letters will include an opening paragraph which briefly explains who the ABS is and why the respondent's co-operation is important.

For example:

"Everyday, people make important decisions based on the wide range of high quality statistics produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The quality and usefulness of these statistics relies heavily on the co-operation of people like yourself who complete ABS surveys."

The first paragraph should state that the respondent has been selected in a survey, the name of the survey and the type and frequency of the survey.

For example:

"Your business has been selected to represent your industry in the annual Economic Activity Survey."

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Purpose of the survey

The purpose of the survey should always be included. Not only does the purpose statement provide information about the collection, it is a chance to explain to the respondent that the request for data is important and useful to the community. It should be a brief, unbiased explanation of how the information collected is going to be used and for what purpose.

The purpose stated in the covering letter is slightly more expanded than that of reminder letters. This paragraph should also vary across surveys, as it should explain what is special about each one.

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Due date

The due date is one of the most important inclusions of the cover letter, and should stand out above all other information if possible. This piece of information conveys to the respondent the expectation of completion by a certain date. The due date should be in 12 point, bold for emphasis.

For example:

"Please complete the enclosed form and return it in the reply paid envelope by **30 August 2006**."

When a form needs to be re-dispatched to a respondent, for example when they have lost the original or if the original form was a return to sender (RTS), the original due date is not appropriate for use on the covering letter. In this case use "within 14 days of receipt", with the text still in bold.

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Authority and confidentiality

Respondents are more likely to comply if the request is being made by someone who is perceived to have legitimate authority. Mention of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* is an important inclusion in the cover letter. Not only is it a chance to reassure the respondent that data collected is kept completely confidential (in accordance with the Act) it is also a chance to increase the legitimacy (hence the persuasiveness) of the request.

For example:

"This survey is being conducted by the ABS under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. The Act ensures that the information you provide is treated as strictly confidential and will be used for statistical purposes only."

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General tailoring

The words used in the covering letter should be tailored where appropriate for the collection or respondent group. The first example below is used for the set of Economic Activity Survey forms, which contain mostly financial questions. Some standard items which would vary from this example include:

Any other survey would have a different explanation of how the statistics will be used.

A survey with sequencing would have "Please complete all relevant questions" rather than "...all questions".

The phrase "Your business.." would be replaced with "Your organisation" for surveys going to e.g. non-profit organisations, or with simply "You.." where the target is an individual such as with some environment surveys.

Specific notes about completing the form should be aligned e.g. "whole dollars" rather than "thousand dollars" would be used where appropriate.

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Example 1: Economic Activity Survey 2005-06:

Economic Activity Survey 2005-06

Every day, people make important decisions based on the wide range of high quality statistics produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The quality and usefulness of the statistics produced from this collection rely heavily on the support of people like yourself who complete ABS surveys.

Your business has been selected to represent your industry in the annual Economic Activity Survey. I seek your cooperation in filling out the enclosed form.

The statistics will be used by businesses, governments and industry to develop and monitor macro- and micro-economic policy, and to identify structural, competition and performance issues across all Australian industries.

Please complete and return the form by **8 September 2006**. A reply paid envelope is provided for your convenience. Please complete all the questions and provide data to the nearest thousand dollars (\$'000).

Careful estimates will suffice where exact figures are not available by the due date.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*, which ensures that your completed form remains confidential to the ABS.

If you need help completing this form, or want to know more about this survey, please call **1800 882 362** (freecall). We can often advise on ways of making this task easier for you.

Thank you for your assistance with this important request for information.

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

18 August 2006

P.S. The ABS makes available a wide range of useful statistics free-of-charge, thanks to the data provided by people such as you. For details, see the ABS website, www.abs.gov.au.

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Specific tailoring

Tailoring more of the covering letter is sometimes appropriate to optimise its effectiveness, although in these cases DCM should be consulted. The covering letter below, used for the Agricultural Census 2005-06, is an example of tailoring the tone of the content to suit the respondent target group. All letters should be written using plain English, however it was particularly important for this letter to convey the message as clearly as possible to respondents with a range of literacy and English skills. This letter also used a larger font because many of the respondents were expected to be old enough to have failing eyesight.

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Example 2: Agricultural Census 2005-06

Agricultural Census 2005-06

The Agricultural Census is the largest business survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. An Agricultural Census form is being sent to all farming businesses in Australia.

The quality and usefulness of the statistics produced from this collection rely heavily on support from the agricultural community. I seek your cooperation in filling out the enclosed form.

The statistics will be used by government to develop policy to assist agricultural activity in Australia. They will be used by farmers and their representatives to help in making informed decisions. Associated industries will use the statistics in planning for the provision of goods and services to this significant sector of the Australian economy.

A brochure has been provided to assist you. It gives advice on:

- what to do if you **no longer operate, or never have operated, a farm**;
- what to tell us if you are involved in **sharefarming**;
- what to do if you have **received more than one form**;
- why it is important to provide farm location details in **Question 7**; and
- what to do if you are a **beekeeper**.

I ask you to complete all the questions that are relevant to your operations. Please complete and return the form **by the due date on the form or within 14 days of receipt**. A reply paid envelope is provided for your convenience.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* which ensures that your completed form remains confidential to the ABS. There is more information about confidentiality in the brochure.

If you need help completing this form, please call 1800 647 011 (freecall). Thank you for your assistance with this important request for information.

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

9 June 2006

Envelope contents: 1 form, 1 brochure, 1 reply-paid envelope, 1 letter

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Further tailoring may be appropriate for a specific respondent sub-group. A quite different covering letter to the example above was developed for respondents who may have been affected by cyclones that year. That letter was particularly emphatic about the importance of those respondents' completed forms as well as expressing understanding of their situation. This level of tailoring is acceptable in certain circumstances, however testing is strongly recommended.

A letter that is appropriate for one mode of collection will generally not be suitable for other modes of collection. For example, the Job Vacancy Survey (JVS) is a telephone survey, with respondents being sent a card explaining what to report later when they are called by the ABS. Therefore, the standard covering letter language had to be adapted for the JVS covering letter (shown below) which goes out with the telephone reporting card.

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Example 3: Job Vacancies

Survey of Job Vacancies - Replacement of Telephone Reporting Record

Enclosed is a new Telephone Reporting Record (TRR), as the previous one has now lapsed. Please **retain** the TRR which is designed to last for up to 2 years.

The purpose of the collection is to produce estimates of job vacancies in Australia which are used as a major economic indicator of employment growth. Governments and businesses make policy and planning decisions based on these statistics. Results of the survey are published in *Job Vacancies, Australia* (ABS Catalogue No. 6354.0).

Because the information for this survey is collected by telephone, it is important that we have the correct contact details for your organisation. If the contact details and/or ABN of your organisation have changed, please advise the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) of this change by calling the freecall telephone number below.

As in previous quarters, please record the number of job vacancies on each survey date. An ABS officer will contact the nominated person on, or shortly after, the survey date to obtain the number of job vacancies.

To help you prepare for data collection over the phone, please record the number of job vacancies on the TRR before the survey date. Careful estimates will suffice where exact figures are not available by the due date.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. All data provided over the phone remains confidential to the ABS.

If you require assistance in completing this form, or want to know more about this survey, please contact us on **1800 622 235** (freecall excluding mobile phones). We can often advise on ways of making this task easier for you.

I would like to thank you for your previous cooperation with this important request for information and look forward to your future cooperation.

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

xx November 2006

P.S. The ABS makes available a wide range of useful statistics free-of-charge, thanks to the data provided by people such as you. For details, see the ABS website, www.abs.gov.au.

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Below are two examples of covering letters tailored to the longitudinal Business Characteristics Survey. For a longitudinal survey it is particularly important to get very high response rates each time, while acknowledging to respondents the effort required from them. The first cover letter is sent to the respondents who are new to the survey cycle. The second cover letter would be sent to the respondents who are currently in the survey cycle.

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Example 4: Business Characteristics Survey (sent to new respondents)

Business Characteristics Survey

Every day, people make important decisions based on the wide range of high quality statistics produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The quality and usefulness of these statistics rely heavily on the cooperation of people like yourself who complete ABS surveys. Your business, along with approximately 3,000 other Australian businesses, has been selected to represent small and medium businesses in the new Business Characteristics Survey (BCS).

The results of the survey are being used by Commonwealth and State government agencies to evaluate and develop policies designed to promote the growth and improved performance of small and medium business in Australia. This has the potential to directly or indirectly affect your business. To gain the most benefit from the efforts of businesses in completing the survey, it is important that you continue completing the survey each year.

The 2005-06 BCS form will be sent to you in **early March 2007**.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. Your completed form remains confidential to the ABS.

If you are not the best person to complete this survey or there is updated information available for any aspect of the address, please contact us on **1800 681 979** (freecall excluding mobile phones) by **22 February 2007**.

I would like to thank you for your continued cooperation in assisting the ABS with this important survey.

Yours sincerely

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

2 February 2007

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Example 5: Business Characteristics Survey (sent to continuing respondents)

Business Characteristics Survey

Thank you for your participation in the first Business Characteristics survey (BCS), sent to you in [March 2006](#), covering the 2004-05 financial year. Your business helped to achieve a response rate of over 97% to this important survey.

The results of the survey will be used by Commonwealth and State government agencies to evaluate and develop policies designed to promote the growth and improved performance of small and medium business in Australia. This has the potential to directly or indirectly affect your business. However, to gain the most benefit from the efforts of businesses in completing the survey, it is important that you continue completing the survey each year.

Businesses selected for the BCS remain in the survey for five years. This enables analysts to explore factors that impact on business productivity and performance over time. The survey will contribute to the ABS's new Business Longitudinal Database and a publication on business characteristics and performance to be released early this year. The survey report will allow you to compare your business with other similar businesses on a range of characteristics.

The 2005-06 BCS form will be sent to you in [early March 2007](#).

This survey form collects information about business characteristics, Information Technology (IT) and innovation activity that was previously collected in three different surveys. The new BCS replaces these surveys and reduces the overall burden on the business community. The owner or manager of the business should still be best placed to provide the information sought rather than an accountant. No complex financial information is required and most questions in the survey only require a tick box response, to minimise the effort in completion.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. Your completed form remains confidential to the ABS.

If you are not the best person to complete this survey or there is updated information available for any aspect of the address, please contact us on **1800 681 979** (freecall excluding mobile phones) by [22 February 2007](#).

I would like to thank you for your continued cooperation in assisting the ABS with this important survey.

Yours sincerely

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

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Survey Letters-Reminder Letters

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REMINDER LETTERS

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- Required content for reminder letters
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 - Second reminder
 - Third reminder
- Due date
- Collection specific information
- Provision of a new form
- Examples of reminders

Introduction

The purpose of a reminder, regardless of its nature, is to remind respondents that they have not fulfilled their obligations to return a completed form. Although reminders are a very important part of the collection process, there is no legal obligation for the ABS to issue them. Experience has shown however, that reminders increase response rates in the period following their issue.

Reminders should be designed with the following in mind:

- appropriate language should be used;

- important elements should be stressed, and,
- the 'message' should be plain.

For letter details common to all letters, see Survey Letters-Common Content. The remainder of this document deals with the areas specific to reminder letters.

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Types of reminders

All the reminders should be linked to the form to which they relate. This is the most effective way of reminding respondents of their obligations. All reminders encourage the provider to willingly complete the form to assist the ABS to provide data for their industry.

There are three levels of reminders generally used by the ABS. The first reminder is a gentle encouragement for respondents to complete and return their survey forms. The second reminder reinforces the message in the first reminder, by referring in greater detail to the ability of the ABS to direct respondents to comply. The third reminder is a very strongly worded letter that will leave the respondent in no doubt as to the course of action that may follow should they not comply.

Currently, written reminders in the ABS are only produced in a letter format. In the past, postcards have been used in bulk despatches by larger collections. At this stage, only reminders in the letter format are to be used, generally complemented by telephone follow-up.

Email is not currently an acceptable method of reminding respondents unless those respondents are already contributing their data via a standard electronic form. Any e-communications with respondents (whether the content of a particular message is sensitive/ confidential or not) should be secured/encrypted as per Government & ABS policy. The same information should be included in 'letters' sent by email as in mailed letters, especially when both are used within the same survey.

The use of faxes to send reminders is an acceptable way of contacting respondents when time is limited. The same standards and guidelines used with reminders sent through the post should be applied when using fax.

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Required Content for Reminder Letters

All reminders must clearly show the **collection** to which they refer. Many respondents receive a number of forms, both from the ABS and other sources, and may relate a reminder to the last (or first) received if the collection name is not immediately apparent. The title of the collection should be at the top of the letter. It should follow a salutation if there is one. The reference line should be 12 point, bold, in leading capitals and centred.

The **reference period** of the collection to which the reminder refers must be clearly stated. Reminder action may extend into a later collection period (particularly in the case of monthly collections) and it is imperative that the respondent relate the reminder to the data required.

For example:

Economic Activity Survey 2005-06

First Reminder

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First reminder

For the purpose of reminder letters the collection reference line should be expanded to include the words "Reminder" or "First Reminder".

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Second reminder

For second reminders, the phrase "Overdue Survey Form" should be added in front of the survey title and add "Second" to the third line:

Overdue Survey Form

Economic Activity Survey 2005-06

Second Reminder

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Third reminder

For third reminders, you should add the word "URGENT" above the collection title. This word should be 12 point, bold, in upper case. Also the reference line should include the following phrase after the collection title for greater emphasis. This should be in 12 point, bold. The whole collection reference line will now emphasise the importance of the letter to the provider:

******URGENT******

Economic Activity Survey 2005-06

Your survey form is still outstanding and is required immediately

More than three reminders may be used, however their effectiveness will decrease with each similar mailing. The number of the reminder should generally not be added to the letter because respondents given extensions, receiving re-dispatches etc. may lead to intermediate reminders being skipped. Words like "final" or "last" reminder should not be used on any reminders.

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Due date

The original due date must be included. This is included in the opening paragraph. Unlike other letter types the due date on a reminder letter is not to be bold. For example:

'In early August, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) sent you a form for the above survey which was due for return by 30 August 2006.....'

A reminder generally does not provide a new due date. A new due date has the potential to reset in the respondent's mind a date in the future by which time they need to respond, when what we really require is an immediate response. The first and second reminders will ask for the information **"as soon as possible"** whilst the third reminder asks for the information **"immediately"**. Both these phrases should be 10 point, bold.

Any reminder action runs the risk of the reminder crossing in the mail with the return of the form in question. All reminders should therefore carry the proviso **'If you have already completed and returned the form, thank you for your timely cooperation and please ignore this reminder.'** This statement should be the second paragraph and be in 10 point, bold.

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Collection specific information

Other information of a collection-specific nature may be included in the reminder if this is felt to be necessary, but it should be borne in mind that it is the impact of the above mandatory elements that will jog the respondent's memory any further information will possibly be overlooked or will dilute the message.

The reminder should include a paragraph outlining why a completed form is important to the respondent and other Australian businesses. The intention of this paragraph is to highlight to the respondent the benefits of completing the form to their business. The word **"important"** is in bold to highlight this paragraph to the respondent.

For example:

"Obtaining a completed form from your business is **important** because many people need to understand the performance of Australian businesses and monitor changes in their operation and structure. Governments and businesses make decisions based on these statistics, for example, to address policy issues on how to best support Australian businesses. These decisions have the potential to directly or indirectly affect your business."

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Provision of a new form

When issuing the third reminder, it is important to include a new survey form. This will allow those who have not responded because they lost their survey form to easily complete and return their information to the ABS.

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Examples of reminders

Example 1: First Reminder Letter

Economic Activity Survey <survey reference period>

Reminder

In <despatch month> the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) sent you a form for the above survey which was due for return by <due date>. According to our records, this form is still outstanding.

If you have already completed and returned the form to us, thank you for your timely cooperation and please ignore this reminder.

I seek your cooperation in returning your completed form **as soon as possible**.

Obtaining a completed form from your business is **important** because many people need to understand the performance of Australian businesses and monitor changes in their operation and structure. Businesses and governments make decisions based on these statistics. These decisions have the potential to affect your business.

The information requested is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. The Act provides the Australian Statistician with the power, if needed, to direct you to provide the information sought. The Act also ensures the information supplied remains confidential to the ABS.

If your business did not receive a survey form, the form has been misplaced, or you need help completing the form please call **1800 882 362** (freecall excluding mobile phones).

Thank you for your assistance with this important request for information.

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

<signing date>

P.S. The ABS makes available a wide range of useful statistics free-of-charge, thanks to the data provided by people such as you. For details, see the ABS website, www.abs.gov.au.

Example 2: Second Reminder Letter

Overdue Survey Form

Economic Activity Survey <survey reference period>

Second Reminder

In <despatch month> the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) sent you a form for the above survey which was due for return by <due date>. According to our records, this form is still outstanding.

If you have already completed and returned the form to us, thank you for your timely cooperation and please ignore this reminder.

Failure to provide the information sought affects the ability of the ABS to provide accurate statistics within an acceptable time frame. A completed form from you is **important** because many people need to understand the performance of Australian businesses and monitor changes in their operation and structure. Businesses and governments make decisions based on these statistics. For example, policy issues are addressed regarding how to best support Australian businesses. These decisions have the potential to affect your business.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. The Act:

- i. provides the Australian Statistician, or his delegate, with the power to direct businesses to provide the information sought. Legal proceedings may be taken against businesses which ignore such a direction; and
- ii. ensures that all information provided to the ABS is strictly confidential. Statistics are only released at an aggregate level which does not allow individual businesses to be identified. ABS staff are required to sign an oath of secrecy and face severe penalties for any breach of confidentiality.

It is now a matter of **urgency** that a completed form from your business is received **as soon as possible**. If precise figures are not available, careful estimates are acceptable.

If you need help completing the form or would like to discuss this matter further, please call **1800 882 362** (freecall excluding mobile phones).

Thank you for your assistance with this important request for information.

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

<signing date>

Example 3: Third Reminder Letter

****URGENT****

Economic Activity Survey <survey reference period>

Your survey form is still outstanding and is required immediately

In <despatch month> the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) sent you a form for the above survey which was due for return by <due date>. Despite further requests for the information, our records show that your form is still outstanding. This information is now urgently required.

If you have already completed and returned the form to us, thank you for your cooperation and please ignore this reminder.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. The Act:

i. provides the Australian Statistician, or his delegate, with the power to direct businesses to provide the information sought. Legal proceedings may be taken against businesses which ignore such a direction;

ii. allows for a penalty of up to \$110 per day for failure to complete and return a form when directed; and

iii. ensures that all information provided to the ABS is strictly confidential. Statistics are only released at an aggregate level which does not allow individual businesses to be identified. ABS staff are required to sign an oath of secrecy and face severe penalties for any breach of confidentiality.

It is now a matter of **urgency** that a completed survey form from your business is returned **immediately**. Where exact figures are not available, careful estimates are acceptable. If you need help completing the form or would like to discuss this matter further, please call **1800 882 362** (freecall excluding mobile phones).

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

<signing date>

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Survey Letters-Examples of Other Letters

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EXAMPLES OF OTHER LETTERS

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- Passive refusal letter
- Active refusal letter
- Pre-NOD(Notice of Direction)Letter
- NOD (Notice of Direction)letter
- Response to special requests letter
- Exemption letter
- Acknowledgement letter

Introduction

There are several types of letters that are part of the survey process but are mailed to respondents on an individual basis. These letters should be personalised, using the respondent's name and specific details of their situation. They should also use the signature and job title of the specific ABS person dealing with their case. A brief description and example of each type is given below, with the blue text to indicate where specific cycle information needs to be added.

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Passive refusal letter

The passive refusal letter is mailed to respondents who, after repeated attempts by the ABS, cannot be contacted. This letter should be sent by Registered Post with the Unit ID recorded on the pink slip.

Example:

<Name of respondent>
<Name of business>
<First address line>
<Second address line>
<Third address line>

Attention: Mr/Ms/Mrs First Name Surname

Dear Mr/Ms/Mrs Surname,

In Month Year, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) requested that your business complete a form for the Full Survey Name by due date on the form. **Despite further requests for the information, our records show that your form is still outstanding. This information is now needed urgently.** I am writing to you now to explain a little more about this survey and to ask for your cooperation in supplying the information requested.

Purpose of the survey (taken from covering letter). Results of this survey will be used by government, industry and business analysts to assist in policy development and informed decision making, which may directly or indirectly affect your business.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. The Act provides the Australian Statistician, or his delegate, with the power to direct businesses to provide the information sought. The Act also allows for a **penalty of up to \$110 per day** for failure to complete and return a form when directed. Information supplied to the ABS under the Act remains confidential to the ABS.

We require the enclosed form to be returned by Day Month Year. If exact figures are not available from your records, careful estimates are acceptable. If you fail to complete and return the Full Survey Name form (and, if applicable, supplementary form(s)) for survey cycle by Day Month Year, consideration will be given to recommending to the Australian Statistician that he issue you with a direction under the Act.

I look forward to your cooperation and would appreciate the return of the completed form by the due date. If your form has not been returned by this date, a senior member of staff will contact you.

Should you wish to discuss this matter or require any assistance, please contact me on 02 6252 XXXX or 1800 XXX XXX (freecall excluding mobile phones) and quote reference number ATOXXXXXXX.

Yours sincerely,

<Signature>

Name of signatory (Signatory should be at the APS4/5 level)

Position of signatory

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Day Month Year

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Active refusal letter

The active refusal letter is mailed to respondents who have explicitly stated that they refuse to comply with the ABS's request for data. It is mailed before the pre-NOD letter, but the refusal can occur at any time during the follow-up process. For example, a respondent who refuses to comply after receiving the first reminder will be sent an active refusal letter.

This letter should be sent by Registered Post with the Unit ID recorded on the pink slip.

Example:

<Name of respondent>
<Name of business>
<First address line>
<Second address line>
<Third address line>

Attention: Mr/Ms/Mrs First Name Surname

Dear Mr/Ms/Mrs Surname,

I refer to a telephone conversation(s) between my staff and yourself in which you indicated your refusal to participate in the Full Survey Name. I am writing to you now to explain a little more about this survey and to ask for your cooperation in supplying the information requested.

Purpose of the survey (taken from covering letter). Results of this survey will be used by government, industry and business analysts to assist in policy development and informed decision making, which may directly or indirectly affect your business.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. The Act provides the Australian Statistician, or his delegate, with the power to direct businesses to provide the information sought. The Act also allows for a **penalty of up to \$110 per day** for failure to complete and return a form when directed. Information supplied to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) under the Act remains confidential to the ABS.

We require the enclosed form to be returned by **Day Month Year**. If exact figures are not available from your records, careful estimates are acceptable. If you fail to complete and return the **Full Survey Name** form (and, if applicable, supplementary form(s)) for **survey cycle** by **Day Month Year**, consideration will be given to recommending to the Australian Statistician that he issue you with a direction under the Act.

I look forward to your cooperation and would appreciate the return of the completed form by the due date. If your form has not been returned by this date, a senior ABS staff member will contact you.

Should you wish to discuss this matter or require any assistance, please contact me on 02 6252 XXXX or **1800 XXX XXX** (freecall excluding mobile phones) and quote reference number **ATOXXXXXXX**.

Yours sincerely,

<Signature>

<Name of signatory>

<Position of signatory>

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Day Month Year

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Pre-NOD (Notice of Direction) letter

The pre-NOD letter gives the respondent one more opportunity to submit a completed form to the ABS. It advises the respondent of the implications should they choose not to respond, specifically, the ABS' ability to initiate legal proceedings under the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*.

Example:

<Name of respondent>

<Name of business>

<First address line>

<Second address line>

<Third address line>

Dear <Respondent's Name>,

Legal Action: <Name of survey>

Despite attempts to gain your cooperation, a completed form for the above survey remains outstanding. I am writing to seek your cooperation in completing this survey form, and to advise you of the implications if you do not respond.

The importance of these statistics to the government and industry has been stressed in previous contact as have offers of assistance in completing the form.

If you fail to complete and return the enclosed survey form by **<bold due date>**, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) will consider initiating legal proceedings against **<name of provider>** under the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*.

The Act provides for penalties of **up to \$110 per day** for failure to comply with a direction to complete and return a statistical return. This same Act provides you with a guarantee that your information will remain confidential and that the data released are only at an aggregate level.

I have enclosed the following survey form for completion:

- <Name of survey>

Please give this matter your immediate attention. For your convenience, I have enclosed a reply-paid envelope for its return and a copy of the form for your records. Careful estimates are acceptable if exact figures are not available.

If you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact **<PCU contact>**, Assistant Director, Provider Contact Unit on **<phone number of PCU contact>** (reverse charge calls will be accepted) and quote reference number **ATOXXXXXXX**.

Yours sincerely,

<Signature>

<Name of signatory>

<Position of signatory>

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Day Month Year

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NOD (Notice of Direction) letter

The NOD letter advises that the ABS is taking legal action against the respondent because they have failed to submit a completed form (after repeated requests to do so). Legal action can only be avoided if the form is provided "...within 15 days after the service of (the) notice".

Example:

Census and Statistics Act 1905
Direction Under Subsection 10(4)

TO: <Name of respondent>

<First address line>

<Second address line>

<Third address line>

Pursuant to subsection 10(4) of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* and for the purpose of enabling the statistics referred to in Part III of that Act to be collected,

I, <name of ABS contact>, the person holding the office of <position held>, <State or Territory in which position is held>, being a person to whom the powers of the Statistician under that sub-section have been delegated in pursuance of section 17 of the Act, hereby direct you - to fill up and supply, in accordance with the instructions contained in the form entitled <Name of form> accompanying this notice, the particulars specified in that form and to cause the form, so filled up, to be furnished to an authorised officer, in accordance with those instructions, within 15 days after the service of this notice.

Pursuant to subsection 10(5) of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* I draw to your attention the provisions of section 14 of that Act which states:

"(1) A person who, without reasonable excuse, refuses or fails to comply with a direction served on the person under subsection 10(4) or 11(2) is, in respect of each day during which the person so refuses or fails to comply with the direction (including the day of a conviction under this section or any subsequent day), guilty of an offence punishable on conviction by a fine not exceeding \$110.

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply in relation to a refusal or failure by a person to answer a question, or to supply particulars, relating to the person's religious beliefs."

Dated this.....day of.....20.....

.....

NOTE:

(1) Subsection 10(4) of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* provides that:

"For the purposes of section 8 or 9, the Statistician may, by notice in writing served either personally or by post on a person, direct the person -

- (a) to fill up and supply, in accordance with instructions contained in or accompanying a form accompanying the notice, within such period after the service of the notice, being not less than 14 days, as is specified in the notice, the particulars specified in that form; and
- (b) to cause the form so filled up to be furnished to the Statistician, or to an authorized officer, in accordance with those instructions."

(2) Subsection 10(5) of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* provides that:

"A notice referred to in subsection (4) shall set out the effect of the provisions of section 14".

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Response to special requests letter

Respondents contact the ABS for extensions, for help understanding and filling out their form or to make other special requests. In cases where the request is unreasonable and cannot be met, a "response to special request" letter is mailed.

For example, a response to a request for payment:

<Name of respondent>

<Name of business>

<First address line>

<Second address line>

<Third address line>

Dear <Respondent's Name>,

I am writing to you regarding your quote for completion of The Survey of Research and Experimental Development 2005 - 2006 for \$480.00 which you sent to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Your survey form is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act, 1905*. The Act does not provide for payment to be made for supplying information, and consequently the ABS is not authorised to use public funds for that purpose. Apart from significantly increasing the ABS's costs, which in turn are borne by the Australian tax-payer, there is no fair and equitable means of administering such a scheme.

The Federal and State Governments make extensive use of statistics for planning, budgets, advisory services and for policies, which may directly or indirectly affect your business. Results of this survey are also used by a range of organisations and industries for planning and decision making.

I would like to assure you that the ABS is very much aware of the workload imposed on the business community by the need to complete our statistical returns on a continuing basis, and that a determined effort is made to limit ABS requests for data to a minimum.

Finally, I would like to thank you for your cooperation in providing the data. I would like to assure you that the ABS appreciates the efforts of businesses, such as yours, that willingly provide the required data. If you have any additional questions or queries, please contact the ABS on **1800 XXX XXX** (freecall excluding mobile phones) and quote reference number **ATOXXXXXXX**.

Yours sincerely,

<Signature>

<Name of signatory>

<Position of signatory>

Australian Bureau of Statistics

<Day Month Year>

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Exemption letter

In some situations, a respondent may have a genuine reason for not participating in the survey. In these cases an exemption may be granted and an exemption letter sent.

For example:

<Name of respondent>

<Name of business>

<First address line>

<Second address line>

<Third address line>

Dear <Respondent's name>,

Thank you for your correspondence of <Day Month Year> to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) regarding <business's name> participation in ABS Surveys. I am pleased to inform you that we will grant you a temporary exemption from <number> ABS surveys.

A review of <business's name> participation in the <survey name/s> indicates that the business meets the conditions for granting a temporary exemption. Accordingly, I have granted you an exemption from these surveys for three years. However, I should point out that as long as your business has an active Australian Business Number (ABN), it may be selected in other surveys undertaken by the ABS.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your efforts in past years in completing these Survey forms. If you have any additional questions or queries, please contact the Provider Liaison Team on **1800 XXX XXX** (freecall excluding mobile phones), and quote reference number **ATOXXXXXXX**.

Yours sincerely,

<Signature>

<Name of signatory>

<Position of signatory>

Australian Bureau of Statistics

<Day Month Year >

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Acknowledgement letter

A respondent may send all sorts of correspondence to the ABS, separately or attached to survey forms. In some cases these may not be able to be dealt with immediately. The ABS has an obligation to respond to correspondence within a certain timeframe so a letter which simply acknowledges the correspondence may be sent first.

For example:

<Name of respondent>

<Name of business>

<First address line>

<Second address line>

<Third address line>

Attention: **Mr/Ms/Mrs First Name Surname**

Dear **Mr/Ms/Mrs Surname**,

Thank you for your correspondence of **Day Month Year** to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Your correspondence has been marked for action. Investigation into your situation will be conducted and you will be advised of the outcome in the near future.

If you wish to discuss this further please contact the ABS on **1 800 XXX XXX** (freecall excluding mobile phones) and quote reference number **ATOXXXXXX**.

Yours sincerely,

<Signature>

<Name of signatory>

<Position of signatory>

Australian Bureau of Statistics

<Day Month Year>

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Survey Letters-Survey Emails

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SURVEY EMAILS

While aspects of these standards will be of interest to those outside the ABS, they were developed for internal use. As such, some information contained in these standards will not be applicable to an external audience. ABS staff should refer to the Corporate Manuals database for the most recent version of these documents, as some details (names, phone numbers etc.) have been removed from the online version.

Contents

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Introduction

It is currently ABS policy not to encourage email communication as well as to actively discourage electronic reporting, due to the security issues and the cost to both the data provider and the ABS.

There are, however, a growing number of collections which have approved use of electronic reporting. These email standards and guidelines are to be used only for the purposes of standardising email contact by approved sections of the ABS where the method of receipt of data is via the Secure Deposit Box (SDB).

The survey emails should keep the same high standards developed for the Business Survey Letters. In order to uphold these standards, certain issues have to be addressed, to ensure the quality of communication and response rate are not affected by the method of communication.

Due to inherent differences between the mediums of paper letters and emails, there are some main format differences that need to be taken into consideration when adapting survey letters for email communication. The differences mentioned in this section are based on the recommendations made as part of a literature review regarding the current guidelines and standards in e-communication.

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Typography and formatting

The layout and format in which the receiver sees the email is extremely important. The email, like letters, must be presented in such a way which will facilitate the reader's ability to comprehend the information with ease, and highlight those issues which must be given priority. The Survey Letter Standards go to great length to ensure that the format is standardised to ensure clear communication and best response. These guidelines include issues such as font, text size, capitalisation, headings, margins, and justification. Another reason for the format guidelines is to ensure uniformity in communication from the ABS.

The recipient's operating system is likely to influence the formatting of the email. Therefore, every effort must be made to ensure the email is received in a similar fashion by all respondents. Because it is unknown whether or not the recipient's operating system will strip off any HTML add-ons, if not completely refuse to open the email, emails should be constructed in plain text format. This format does not include the ability to specify format characteristics such as bolding, italics, underlining, justifications, font size or type, or colour. Similarly, bulleting points cannot be added, but can be constructed by other means within the format.

For example:

[5 spaces]1.

[5 spaces]2.

or

[5 spaces]*
[5 spaces]*

To ensure the standardisation of the presentation of the email, the text should be forcefully wrapped at a length of 65 characters per line. This restriction on the length will reduce the likelihood that a recipient's operating system will cut off the line shorter than intended. One method of making the line length maximum of 65 characters is to check the content in UltraEdit Text Editor software. Wrapping text at 65 characters can be done in any software that allows the writer to count the characters, however, below are the instructions for forced wrapping in Ultraedit.

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Once the content of the email is finalised, paste into UltraEdit. From the **Format** heading, select **Convert Wrap to CR/LFs** (see Diagram 1).

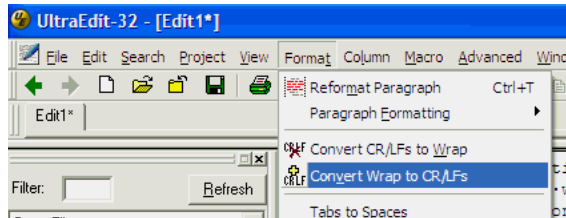


Diagram 1

Using the radio buttons, select **Add Returns at column #:** and manually set the right margin to **65** 'columns' or characters (see Diagram 2).

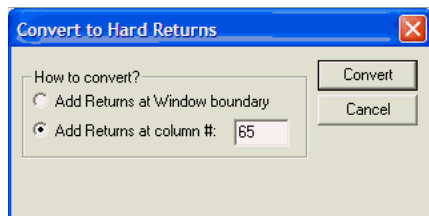


Diagram 2

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If text is not being wrapped it is still important to ensure telephone help numbers appear on a single line rather than being split. Hard returns (using the 'Enter' key) should be used for this if required.

Ideally, the length of the email should be such that the content is able to be viewed in a single screen. However, this is not practical when the respondents' display resolution, etc., is unknown. Similar to the equivalent paper version the email should follow current best practice to be as succinct and short as possible. The layout of the email should make good use of white space for scanability to highlight the important issues to the reader, and may also include unformatted headings, if they add value.

All attachments should be sent in a format which is universally accepted. Apart from email types not covered in these standards, respondents who receive emails from the ABS will be those reporting electronically. Because our only electronic mode of data collection is Excel, attachments in this format are acceptable. All other attachments (e.g. additional important information, instructions, separate definitions, etc.) should be in either a Text File (TXT) format or a Portable Document Format (PDF). If in doubt, agree on a suitable attachment format with the respondent before sending. Attachment file size should be kept to a minimum, being mindful of the recipients' time (bigger files take longer to download) and download restrictions (if a download limit is exceeded, there could be a cost to the respondent).

Ideally, attachments should be placed adjacent to the request for information. However, depending on the respondent's email program, the placement of the attachment is not standardised, and will often appear at the end of the email regardless of where it was placed. Therefore, attachments should be placed at the end of the email.

In addition to the actual e-forms, attachments may include explanatory notes or PDFs of the paper form. Information which is essential to participating in the survey should be included in the email, but information which is only of potential interest to the respondent is generally better delivered by directing the respondent to the ABS website.

A Link in the form of a full URL address should be used within emails to facilitate the respondents' access to information, while not unnecessarily extending the length of the email. Links to websites should not be used for essential instructions or information, but rather for extra information which could be useful or interesting to the respondent. Links to websites also facilitate efficient storage and updating of information on websites.

Ideally, URL addresses should be used to guide respondents to the publications their data is contributing to, for example, to direct respondents to Labour Force Statistics the following URL should be provided: <<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40.nsf/mf/6202.0>>. Full URLs should also be used for the Secure Deposit Box website <<https://www6.abs.gov.au/>> and the ABS Website <<https://www.abs.gov.au/>> (included in the tagline). (Note there is an additional 's' in the SDB URL, i.e., <https://>. This is important as it leads to a lot of provider queries that the SDB is not working.)

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Content

The content of the emails should be based on the text composed for the Survey Letter Standards, while keeping in mind the recommendations included in this section. As per the Business Survey Letter guidelines, an example of each type of survey email is included below.

Addressing

When emailing respondents, ABS staff should ensure that every addressee in the 'To' field is directly involved in the dialogue, or request for information. Emails sent separately to a small number of respondents should primarily use the 'To' field. All addressees in the 'Cc' field should be present in a FYI capacity, and only be included if they are from the same provider organisation. It is important that confidentiality is maintained between respondents, so when bulk emailing information regarding a survey the 'Bcc' field should be used. 'Bcc' can also be used for efficiency reasons, when a separate email for each respondent is not practical. In these cases, it must be acknowledged that the emails will lose value with regards to individualisation, and might result in lower response rates.

To:	Person responsible for actioning request
cc:	Only present in an FYI capacity, and only if they belong to same providing entity as person responsible
bcc:	Only to be used when confidentiality between addressees is necessary
Subject:	

Diagram 3

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Subject line

People writing emails should make proper use of the subject line. The subject should be concise, descriptive, and meaningful to the recipient. No emails should be sent without a subject line. Subject lines should not be written in all capitals, and should not include exclamation marks or unnecessary complications. The use of terms such as 'Urgent' should be kept to a minimum, so as to preserve their effectiveness. The subject of the email should include "Australian Bureau of Statistics" (or "ABS" if space is limited) and the survey title. The provider's business name should also be added. For example, "ABS - Labour Price Index November 2007 - <Name of Business>".

Salutation, signature and disclaimer

Currently the ABS will only email respondents once a request for electronic correspondence has been raised, so contact details, including name of respondent, will be available. In light of this, all ABS outgoing emails should make use of a formal salutation. This salutation should be similar to that used in appropriate survey letters e.g., "Dear Mr/Ms Smith". Salutations should be used throughout all e-communications with respondents.

Similarly, emails should include a professional signature. The signature should be kept between four and six lines of text, (graphics should not be used). The signature should be standardised throughout ABS staff communicating with respondents using email. It should include information, such as position in the organisation, for the purpose of exerting authority. Alternative forms of communication, including the freecall phone number, as well as number to contact regarding the SDB are including in the body of the email, and should not be repeated in the signature. The signature should also carry a tagline, which could be a URL to the ABS website. Below is the standard signature and tagline to be used in e-communications with respondents:

Name of Signatory
Position of Signatory
Australian Bureau of Statistics

P.S. The ABS makes available a wide range of useful statistics free-of-charge, thanks to the data provided by people such as you. For details, see the ABS Website at <<https://www.abs.gov.au/>> .

If the name of the respondent/provider is not available, or is impractical to personalise the email due to bulk despatch, then a salutation should not be used. An obvious sign to the respondent of unimportance is to begin an email with "Dear Respondent/Citizen/Resident/Friend". Emails addressed in this manner are more likely to be disregarded by the respondent as standard junk or spam.

Because any communication between the ABS and respondents is confidential, there should be a disclaimer at the end of the email explaining what the recipient should do if they have received the email in error. For example, the email may have been accidentally sent to the incorrect email address, or the email has been sent to the correct email address, but has been opened by someone other than the addressee. The following disclaimer should be at the end of all emails sent to respondents:

This email and any attachments to it (the "Communication") is intended for the individual or entity named and may contain information that is confidential. If you are not the intended recipient of the Communication, you are notified that any use or dissemination of this Communication is strictly forbidden. If you have received this message in error, please notify the sender immediately by return email, delete the Communication, and do not read, copy, print, retransmit, store or act in reliance on the Communication.

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Body of email

The body of the email should be succinct and concise, but at the same time ensure that all the necessary information is included. The language should be kept professional and use plain English as with letters. Typical online lingo, such as abbreviations, and emoticons, (faces made from characters, e.g. :) or ;-P) should not be used, to uphold the professional standards and ensure that all respondents understand the information.

The text of the email should be based on the content of the existing paper letters. This includes the purpose of the survey, relevant completion instructions, and a confidentiality statement.

Every email should include a paragraph referring to the method of receipt, the Secure Deposit Box website (SDB), together with a contact number for the SDB helpline. The help information should also include the usual details for contacting the PCU.

For example:

If you require assistance in completing this form, or want to know more about this survey, please contact us on 1800 #### (freecall). We can often advise on ways of making this task easier for you. If any problems are encountered in lodging your form via the Secure Deposit Box (<https://www6.abs.gov.au/>), please call 07 3222 6043.

or

The Secure Deposit Box is a mechanism for you to lodge files or text via a secure link, which will ensure the security and confidentiality of your information. Each file you lodge is encrypted during the transmission and is immediately moved into a secure location. If you have any questions regarding lodgement of this form with the Secure Deposit Box, for example incorrect login or password, please contact the ABS on 07 3222 6043.

If an Excel form with macros is being attached to the email, additional instructions regarding how to enable macros should be included.

For example:

Please note, this form contains macros that allow you to tailor the form to your needs. You will need to enable these macros in order to complete the form. You may receive a message upon opening the form indicating the macros have been disabled as this is the default setting for Excel. If this happens, press OK and refer to the instructions on the opening page of the form for assistance.

For content details common to all survey contact, email and letters, as well as explanations for each of the different types of contact, i.e., Pre-approach, Cover, Reminder and other contact, please refer to the Forms Design Standards Manual.

The key difference between the content of emails and the paper letters is the references to the form. The form should be referred to as "attached" rather than "enclosed". The same goes for any separate explanatory notes which may also be attached to the email. Ensure that any references within the email to specific parts of the form or separate notes are still correct and make sense e.g. the notes may still technically have 'pages' but the form may not, it may have 'worksheets' or similar.

Email content that cannot be standardised is not covered in detail in these Standards. Emails, for which there are no standards yet, are still part of the survey process. They are often for the purpose of querying data during the editing phase or to gather *ad hoc* or supplementary information from providers who have already completed questionnaires.

These emails should always be personalised and professional, however, specific details of the respondent's situation, e.g. percentage pay movements or dollar figures, cannot be mentioned.

The following examples are adaptations of the current letter standards, based on the above email recommendations.

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Email examples

Pre-approach emails

For general information about pre-approach contact, please look at Survey Letters-Pre-approach Letters.

Pre-approach emails might not be used often, as emails will generally only be used to communicate with respondents who specifically ask for this mode of communication. Therefore, it would be unlikely that our first contact with the respondent would be via email. However, in the future a respondent who already reports for one or more surveys electronically may be approached in regards to an additional survey by email.

If used, pre-approach emails should be short, standard emails that briefly describe the purpose of the collection, when the form will arrive and often the due date for the survey form's return. This email would be a good opportunity to raise the respondent's motivation to comply by presenting the ABS as an approachable and helpful organisation (freecall number provided) which collects information to help inform important decision making which has the potential to affect the respondent.

Example of pre-approach letter and how it should be changed according to the e-guidelines:

Business Characteristics Survey 2004-05

People make important decisions based on the wide range of high quality statistics produced by the Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The quality and usefulness of these statistics rely heavily on the cooperation of people like yourself who complete ABS surveys. Your business, along with approximately 3,000 other Australian businesses, has been selected to represent small and medium businesses in the new Business Characteristics Survey (BCS).

The results will be used by Commonwealth and State government agencies to evaluate and develop policies designed to promote the growth and improved performance of small and medium business in Australia. This has the potential to directly or indirectly affect your business. The survey will also contribute to the ABS's new Business Longitudinal Database and a publication on business characteristics and performance to be released later this year.

Your business will remain in the survey for five years. This period will enable analysts to explore factors that impact on business productivity and performance over time. Each year your business will receive a survey form for which most questions asked only require a tick box response to minimise the effort in completion.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. Your completed form remains confidential to the ABS.

The first BCS form will be sent to you in early March. Our testing has shown that the owner or manager of the business is usually best placed to provide the information sought. This form does not require an accountant to complete as no financial details are required. If you are not the best person to complete this survey or there is updated information available for any aspect of the address, please contact us on freecall 1800 681 979 by 22 February 2006.

I would like to thank you in anticipation of your cooperation.

Yours sincerely

Acting Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

3 February 2006

P.S. The ABS makes available a wide range of useful statistics free-of-charge, thanks to the data provided by people such as you. For details, see the ABS website, www.abs.gov.au.

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Example of pre-approach email:

To	jane.smith@respondent.com.au
cc	only.if.necessary@respondent.com.au
bcc	
Subject	Australian Bureau of Statistics - Survey of *****

Business Characteristics Survey 2004-05

Dear <Respondent's name>

Every day, people make important decisions based on the wide range of high quality statistics produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The quality and usefulness of these statistics rely heavily on the cooperation of people like yourself who complete ABS surveys. Your business, along with approximately 3,000 other Australian businesses, has been selected to represent small and medium businesses in the new Business Characteristics Survey (BCS).

The results will be used by Commonwealth and State government agencies to evaluate and develop policies designed to promote the growth and improved performance of small and medium business in Australia. This has the potential to directly or indirectly affect your business. The survey will also contribute to the ABS's new Business Longitudinal Database and a publication on business characteristics and performance to be released later this year.

Your business will remain in the survey for five years. This period will enable analysts to explore factors that impact on business productivity and performance over time. Each year your business will receive a survey form for which most questions asked only require a tick box response to minimise the effort in completion. The information asked for is collected under the authority of the Census and Statistics Act 1905. Your completed form remains confidential to the ABS.

The first BCS form will be sent to you in early March. Our testing has shown that the owner or manager of the business is usually best placed to provide the information sought. This form does not require an accountant to complete as no financial details are required. If you are not the best person to complete this survey or there is updated information available for any aspect of the address, please contact us on [freecall 1800 681 979](tel:1800681979) by 22 February 2006.

I would like to thank you in anticipation of your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Acting Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

P.S. The ABS makes available a wide range of useful statistics free-of-charge, thanks to the data provided by people such as you. For details, see the ABS website, <http://www.abs.gov.au/>

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Covering email

For general information about covering emails, please look in the Survey Letters-Common Content.

Currently, new respondents do not receive a covering email and attached electronic form as the very first ABS contact. For this reason, there are some key differences between the wording of covering letters and covering emails.

There are several instances where a cover email may be an appropriate form of contact. Contacts receiving emails could be existing respondents of the survey who have explicitly asked to report electronically. In this case, the introduction would differ from a letter because it would acknowledge prior communication. For example, "Thank you for the request to provide information in the Survey of...electronically. As discussed, please find attached..."

Additionally, some respondents who receive an electronic form in their first cycle as an electronic reporter may choose to retain the form. In subsequent periods, the respondent is advised, via email, to take a new copy of the file ("roll-over"), complete it and submit it by the specified due date.

For example, for the Survey of International Investment Excel form, most of the respondents receive a new copy of the form each quarter while a small number of respondents are provided with instructions on how to update the metadata in the spreadsheet and to use the same spreadsheet each quarter ("roll-over"). The small number of roll-over respondents receive a joint email (as bcc) informing them that it is time to roll-over the form and the due date for the current quarter submission.

The cover email is usually the first contact for the cycle with existing electronic respondents. The email content should include:

- request of cooperation
- purpose of survey, including hyperlink to publication
- authority and confidentiality
- how to enable macros (where relevant)
- how to submit the form (e.g. SDB)
- due date, or at least reference to the due date available in the form
- eform attached (if the email is not for a roll-over)
- link to ABS website

Example of cover letter, with necessary changes following e-guideline recommendations

Business Characteristics Survey 2005-2006

our participation in the first Business Characteristics Survey (BCS), sent to you in March 2006, covering the 2004-05 financial year. Your business helped to achieve a response rate of over 97% to this important survey.

Similar to last year, most questions asked only require a tick box response to minimise the effort and time taken to respond. Again, the form should only take approximately 25-30 minutes to complete. Although we recognise the load placed upon you as a respondent, it is important to collect the information over the full five year period. The quality and usefulness of these statistics rely heavily on the cooperation of people like yourself who complete ABS surveys.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. Your completed form remains confidential to the ABS. The results from the survey will contribute to the ABS's new Business Longitudinal Database and a publication on business characteristics and performance to be released later this year. They will also be essential in allowing Commonwealth and State government agencies to evaluate and develop policies designed to promote the growth and improved performance of small and medium business in Australia and thus have the potential to directly or indirectly affect your business.

Please complete all relevant questions and return the form in the reply paid envelope by **28 March 2007**.

We are shortening the time between the end of the financial year (for which the data is sought) and when the form is posted to you. As a result, the next form, for the 2006-07 financial year, will be sent to you later this year. The following form, for 2007-08, will be sent to you in mid 2008.

If you need help completing this form, or want to know more about this survey, please contact us on 1800 681 979. We can often advise on ways of making this task easier for you.

Thank you for your assistance with this important request for information.

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

14 March 2007

P.S. The ABS makes available a wide range of useful statistics ~~free-of-charge, thanks~~ to the data provided by people such as you. For details, see the ABS website www.abs.gov.au.

Annotations:

- Bold and centred text changed to plain and left-aligned text.
- References to 'reply paid envelope' should be replaced with explanation of SDB method of receipt.
- Justification cannot be specified in plain text emails.
- Text should be wrapped at 65 characters.
- Italics should be removed for plain text emails.
- Bolding should be removed and text size cannot be specified.
- The full URL should be specified. For example, <<http://www.abs.gov.au>>
- Time and date information is included in the email. This information should not be repeated.

Example of cover email

To	jane.smith@respondent.com.au]
cc	only.if.necessary@respondent.com.au
bcc	
Subject	Australian Bureau of Statistics - Survey of *****

Business Characteristics Survey 2005-2006

Dear <Respondent's name>

Thank you for your participation in the first Business Characteristics Survey (BCS), sent to you in March 2006, covering the 2004-05 financial year. Your business helped to achieve a response rate of over 97% to this important survey.

Similar to last year, most questions asked only require a tick box response to minimise the effort and time taken to respond. Again, the form should only take approximately 25-30 minutes to complete. Although we recognise the load placed upon you as a respondent, it is important to collect the information over the full five year period. The quality and usefulness of these statistics rely heavily on the cooperation of people like yourself who complete ABS surveys.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the Census and Statistics Act 1905. Your completed form remains confidential to the ABS. The results from the survey will contribute to the ABS's new Business Longitudinal Database and a publication on business characteristics and performance to be released later this year. They will also be essential in allowing Commonwealth and State government agencies to evaluate and develop policies designed to promote the growth and improved performance of small and medium business in Australia and thus have the potential to directly or indirectly affect your business.

Please complete all relevant questions and return the form (attached below) to the Secure Deposit Box by 28 March 2007. The Secure Deposit Box is a mechanism for you to lodge files or text via a secure link, which will ensure the security and confidentiality of your information. If you have any questions regarding lodgement of this form with the Secure Deposit Box, for example incorrect login or password, please contact the ABS on (07) 3222 6043.

We are shortening the time between the end of the financial year (for which the data is sought) and when the form is posted to you. As a result, the next form, for the 2006-07 financial year, will be sent to you later this year. The following form, for 2007-08, will be sent to you in mid 2008. If you need help completing this form, or want to know more about this survey, please contact us on 1800 681 979. We can often advise on ways of making this task easier for you.

Thank you for your assistance with this important request for information.

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

P.S. The ABS makes available a wide range of useful statistics free-of-charge, thanks to the data provided by people such as you. For details, see the ABS website, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/>>.

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<<Attachment_example.xls>>

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Example of roll-over email

International Investment Survey, September 2006 Quarter

Dear <Respondent's name>

Thank you for your continued cooperation in lodging data to the ABS for the Survey of International Investment (Form 90).

The following September Quarter 2006 Survey of International Investment (Form 90) form is due on 23 October 2006: <name of business unit>

To use your Survey of International Investment Form 90 from last quarter again this quarter:

1. open the previous quarter's spreadsheet
2. select the 'Metadata' tab
3. ignore the 'Office Use Only' warning
4. change the reference period calendar year and month
5. do not change the provider's unit id or due date
6. complete the spreadsheet without adding rows or selecting countries if the same as previous quarter
7. save the new quarter's spreadsheet using 'Save As' with a new name and/or to a new location as appropriate, to avoid overwriting the previous quarter's data
8. lodge to the ABS using the secure deposit box website <<https://www6.abs.gov.au/>> on or before 23 October 2006. For security reasons it is important that survey data is not returned to the ABS via email.

The ABS will continue to contact you via email each quarter with a courtesy reminder of the due date.

If you require assistance in completing this form, or want to know more about this survey, please contact us on 1800 020 536 (freecall). We can often advise on ways of making this task easier for you. If any problems are encountered in lodging your form via the Secure Deposit Box, please call 07 3222 6043.

Thank you for your assistance with this important request for information.

Acting Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

P.S. The ABS makes available a wide range of useful statistics free-of-charge, thanks to the data provided by people such as you. For details, see the ABS website, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/>>.

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Reminder emails

For general information about reminders, please refer to the Survey Letters-Reminder Letters.

Reminder emails should only be sent out to respondents who specifically ask for email communication and lodge e-forms. All reminders must clearly show the collection to which they refer. Many respondents receive a number of forms, both from the ABS and other sources, and they may relate a reminder to the last (or first) form they received if the collection name is not immediately apparent. The title of the collection should be at the top of the email and in the 'Subject' field.

The reference period of the collection to which the reminder refers must also be clearly stated. Reminder action may extend into a later collection period (particularly in the case of monthly collections) and it is imperative that the respondent relate the reminder to the data required.

If forms have changed from the previous collection cycle it is important to include notification of this in the reminder. This is particularly important for e-forms as data may be automatically extracted. Without notification the respondent may not know that they have to make some changes to their extraction programs, and data quality could potentially be impacted.

There are three levels of reminders generally used by the ABS. The first reminder is a gentle encouragement for respondents to complete and return their survey forms. The second reminder reinforces the message in the first reminder, by referring in greater detail to the ability of the ABS to direct respondents to comply. The third reminder is very strongly worded, that will leave the respondent in no doubt as to the course of action that may follow should they not comply.

All reminders should include:

- escalated importance of request of cooperation
- purpose of survey, including hyperlink to publication
- authority and confidentiality
- how to enable macros (where relevant)

- how to submit the form (e.g. SDB)
- due date, or at least reference to the due date available in the form
- eform attached (if the email is not for a roll-over)
- link to ABS website

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Example of 1st Reminder letter, with e-guidelines recommendations:

Business Characteristics Survey
Reminder

In March 2007, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) sent you a form for the above survey which was due for return by 28 March 2007. According to our records, this form is still outstanding.

If you have already completed and returned the form to us, thank you for your timely cooperation and please ignore this reminder.

I am seeking your cooperation in completing and returning this form without further delay. Could you please do so as soon as possible.

Obtaining a completed form from your business is **important** because many people need to understand the performance of Australian businesses and monitor changes in their operation and structure. The information your business provides will contribute to our Business Characteristics statistics. These statistics are essential in allowing businesses and government agencies to evaluate and develop policies designed to promote the growth and improved performance of small and medium business in Australia and thus have the potential to affect your business.

The information requested is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. The Act provides the Australian Statistician with the power, if needed, to direct you to provide the information sought. The Act also ensures the information supplied remains confidential to the ABS.

If your business did not receive a survey form, the form has been misplaced, or you require assistance please contact the ABS on freecall 1800 681 979.

Thank you for your assistance with this important request for information.

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

3 April 2007

P.S. The ABS makes available a wide range of useful statistics ~~free-of-charge~~, thanks to the data provided by people such as you. For details, see the ABS website, www.abs.gov.au.

Annotations:

- Bold and centred text changed to plain and left-aligned text.
- Justification cannot be specified in plain text emails. Text should be wrapped at 65 characters.
- All bolding should be removed.
- Italics should be removed.
- The full URL should be specified. For example, <http://www.abs.gov.au/>
- Time and date information is included in the email. This information should not be repeated.

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Example of 1st reminder email

To	jane.smith@respondent.com
cc	only.if.necessary@respondent.com
bcc	
Subject	Australian Bureau of Statistics -Reminder - Survey of *****

Business Characteristics Survey

Reminder

Dear <Respondent's name>.

In March 2007, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) sent you a form for the above survey which was due for return by 28 March 2007. According to our records, this form is still outstanding.

If you have already completed and returned the form to us, thank you for your timely cooperation and please ignore this reminder.

I am seeking your cooperation in completing and returning the attached form without further delay. Could you please do so as soon as possible.

Obtaining a completed form from your business is important because many people need to understand the performance of Australian businesses and monitor changes in their operation and structure. The information your business provides will contribute to our Business Characteristics statistics. These statistics are essential in allowing businesses and government agencies to evaluate and develop policies designed to promote the growth and improved performance of small and medium business in Australia and thus have the potential to affect your business.

The information requested is collected under the authority of the Census and Statistics Act 1905. The Act provides the Australian Statistician with the power, if needed, to direct you to provide the information sought. The Act also ensures the information supplied remains confidential to the ABS.

If your business did not receive a survey form, the form has been misplaced, or you require assistance please contact the ABS on [free call 1800 681 979](tel:1800681979). We can often advise on ways of making this task easier for you. If any problems are encountered in lodging your form via the Secure Deposit Box, please call 07 3222 6043.

Thank you for your assistance with this important request for information.

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

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Second Reminder Letter example, with recommendations

Overdue Survey Form
Business Characteristics Survey 2005-2006
Second Reminder

In March, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) sent you a form for the Business Characteristics Survey (BCS) 2005-06, which was due for return on the 28 March 2007. According to our records this form is still outstanding.

If you have already completed and returned the form to us, thank you for your timely cooperation and please ignore this reminder.

Failure to provide the information sought affects the ability of the ABS to provide accurate statistics within an acceptable timeframe. These statistics are essential in allowing businesses and government agencies to evaluate and develop policies designed to promote the growth and improved performance of small and medium business in Australia and thus have the potential to affect your business.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. The Act:

- i. provides the Australian Statistician, or his delegate, with the power to direct businesses to provide the information sought. Legal proceedings may be taken against businesses which ignore such a direction; and
- ii. ensures that all information provided to the ABS is strictly confidential. Statistics are only released at an aggregate level which does not allow individual businesses to be identified. ABS staff are required to sign an oath of secrecy and face severe penalties for any breach of confidentiality.

It is now a matter of urgency that a completed form for your business is received as soon as possible. If precise figures are not available, careful estimates are acceptable. I would like to thank you in anticipation of your prompt response to this important request for information.

If your business did not receive a survey form, the form has been misplaced, or you require assistance in completing this form, please contact us on freecall 1800 681 979.

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

17 April 2007

P.S. The ABS makes available a wide range of useful statistics **free-of-charge** thanks to the data provided by people such as you. For details, see the ABS website, www.abs.gov.au.

Annotations:

- Bold and centred text should be plain and left-aligned text.
- Justification of text cannot be specified in plain text emails. Text should be wrapped at 65 characters.
- All bolding should be removed.
- Italics should be removed.
- Plain text emails will not allow for indentation of paragraphs. Alternative methods of structuring text should be used.
- Time and date information is included in the email. This information should not be repeated.
- The full URL should be specified. For example, <http://www.abs.gov.au/>

Example of 2nd reminder email

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To	jane.smith@respondent.com
cc	only.if.necessary@respondent.com
bcc	
Subject	Australian Bureau of Statistics - Second Reminder - Survey of *****

Overdue Survey Form

Business Characteristics Survey 2005-2006

Second Reminder

Dear <Respondent's name>

In March, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) sent you a form for the Business Characteristics Survey (BCS) 2005-06, which was due for return on the 28 March 2007. According to our records this form is still outstanding.

If you have already completed and returned the form to us, thank you for your timely cooperation and please ignore this reminder. Failure to provide the information sought affects the ability of the ABS to provide accurate statistics within an acceptable timeframe. These statistics are essential in allowing businesses and government agencies to evaluate and develop policies designed to promote the growth and improved performance of small and medium business in Australia and thus have the potential to affect your business.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the Census and Statistics Act 1905.
The Act:

i. provides the Australian Statistician, or his delegate, with the power to direct businesses to provide the information sought. Legal proceedings may be taken against businesses which ignore such a direction; and

ii. ensures that all information provided to the ABS is strictly confidential. Statistics are only released at an aggregate level which does not allow individual businesses to be identified. ABS staff are required to sign an oath of secrecy and face severe penalties for any breach of confidentiality.

It is now a matter of urgency that a completed form for your business is received as soon as possible. If precise figures are not available, careful estimates are acceptable. I would like to thank you in anticipation of your prompt response to this important request for information. If your business did not receive a survey form or the form has been misplaced, please find a copy of the form attached to this email. If you require assistance in completing this form, please contact us on [freecall 1800 681 979](tel:1800681979).

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

P.S. The ABS makes available a wide range of useful statistics free-of-charge, thanks to the data provided by people such as you. For details, see the ABS website, <<http://www.abs.gov.au>>.

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Third reminder letter, with email recommendations:

Bold and centred text should be plain and left-aligned text.

*****URGENT*****

Business Characteristics Survey 2005-2006

Your survey form is still outstanding and required immediately

Justification of text cannot be specified in plain text emails. Text should be wrapped at 65

Plain text emails will not allow for indentation of paragraphs. Alternative methods of structuring text should be used.

In March, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) sent you a form for the Business Characteristics Survey (BCS) 2005-2006, which was due for return by 28 March 2007. Despite further requests for the information, our records show that this form is still outstanding. The information is now urgently required.

If you have already completed and returned the form to us, thank you for your cooperation and please ignore this reminder.

All bolding should be removed.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. The Act:

Italics should be removed

- i. provides the Australian Statistician, or his delegate, with the power to direct businesses to provide the information sought. Legal proceedings may be taken against businesses which ignore such a direction;
- ii. allows for a penalty of up to \$110 per day for failure to complete and return a form when directed; and
- iii. ensures that all information provided to the ABS is strictly confidential. Statistics are only released at an aggregate level which does not allow individual businesses to be identified. ABS staff are required to sign an oath of secrecy and face severe penalties for any breach of confidentiality.

It is now a matter of urgency that a completed survey form for your business is returned immediately. Where exact figures are not available, careful estimates are acceptable. If you require assistance in providing the required information or would like to discuss this matter further, please contact the ABS on freecall 1800 681 979.

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

3 May 2007

The full URL should be specified. For example, <http://www.abs.gov.au/>

Time and date information is included in the email. This information should not be repeated.

P.S. The ABS makes available a wide range of useful statistics ~~free-of-charge~~ thanks to the data provided by people such as you. For details, see the ABS website www.abs.gov.au

Third reminder email

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To	jane.smith@respondent.com
cc	only.if.necessary@respondent.com
bcc	
Subject	Australian Bureau of Statistics - Urgent - Survey of

URGENT

Business Characteristics Survey 2005-2006

Dear <Respondent's name>.

Your survey form is still outstanding and required immediately.

In March, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) sent you a form for the Business Characteristics Survey (BCS) 2005-2006, which was due for return by 28 March 2007. Despite further requests for the information, our records show that this form is still outstanding. The information is now urgently required.

If you have already completed and returned the form to us, thank you for your cooperation and please ignore this reminder.

The information asked for is collected under the authority of the Census and Statistics Act 1905. The Act:

i. provides the Australian Statistician, or his delegate, with the power to direct businesses to provide the information sought. Legal proceedings may be taken against businesses which ignore such a direction;

ii. allows for a penalty of up to \$110 per day for failure to complete and return a form when directed; and

iii. ensures that all information provided to the ABS is strictly confidential. Statistics are only released at an aggregate level which does not allow individual businesses to be identified. ABS staff are required to sign an oath of secrecy and face severe penalties for any breach of confidentiality.

It is now a matter of urgency that a completed survey form for your business is returned immediately. Where exact figures are not available, careful estimates are acceptable. If you require assistance in providing the required information or would like to discuss this matter further, please contact the ABS on freecall 1800 681 979.

Director
Australian Bureau of Statistics

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Exemption emails

In some situations, a respondent may have a genuine reason for not participating in the survey. In these cases an exemption may be granted and an exemption email sent.

Example of exemption letter, with recommendation:

Mr XXXX XXXX
Managing Director
XXXX XXXX XXXX
XXXX
XXXX XXXX XXXX

No need for
address details

Dear Mr XXXX,

Thank you for your correspondence of 22 February 2007 to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) regarding **(company name)** participation in the Economic Activity Survey. In your correspondence you requested an exemption from this survey

I would like to assure you that the ABS is very much aware of the workload imposed on the business community by the need to complete our statistical returns on a continuing basis, and that a determined effort is made to limit ABS requests for data to a minimum.

With regard to exemptions from ABS surveys, the ABS *Business Surveys Charter* states that "Smaller businesses which have provided data for the same survey for three or more consecutive years may seek an exemption from that survey". Our records show that your business has been selected in the Economic Activity Survey (form 3F004) for at least the last five years, however, we have only received data for this survey for the 2002/03 and 2005/06 financial years, therefore you are not currently eligible for an exemption.

However, the above charter does not apply to the Business Characteristics Survey or the Research and Development survey, both of which we have not received a response.

To assist you in completing the survey forms, there are a number of options you may wish to consider to minimise your reporting burden. These are:

- i) providing careful estimates where precise information may not be readily available;
- ii) reporting by telephone; and
- iii) requesting extensions of time.

If you would like to take advantage of any of the above options, or have any other reporting problems or questions, please contact the ABS Provider Liaison Team on **1800 007 448**.

no bold

Assistant Director
Provider Contact Unit
Australian Bureau of Statistics

10 April 2007

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Example of exemption email:

To	jane.smith@respondent.com
cc	only.if.necessary@respondent.com
bcc	
Subject	Australian Bureau of Statistics - Exemption - Survey of *****

Dear <respondent's name>,

Thank you for your correspondence of <date> to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) regarding <business's name> participation in ABS Surveys. I am pleased to inform you that we will grant you a temporary exemption from <number> ABS surveys.

A review of <business's name> participation in the <survey name/s> indicates that the business meets the conditions for granting a temporary exemption. Accordingly, I have granted you an exemption from these surveys for three years.

However, I should point out that as long as your business has an active Australian Business Number (ABN), it may be selected in other surveys undertaken by the ABS.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your efforts in past years in completing these Survey forms. If you have any additional questions or queries, please contact the Provider Liaison Team on Freecall <phone number>, and quote reference <business's ID>.

<Name of signatory>
<Position of signatory>
Australian Bureau of Statistics

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